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"THEY HAD GONE TO A HIGH BANK WHICH THEY CALLED THE
FLAG TOWER."

Frontispiece.

[Page 317.

REX OR WINNING THE VICTORIA CROSS

BY
LOUISA THOMPSON

AUTHOR OF
"THE ROYAL EAGLE: A STORY OF FREDERICK III., GERMANY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. B. WOLLEN, R.I.

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REX

OR

WINNING THE VICTORIA CROSS

CHAPTER I.

THE SON AND HEIR.

"**R**EX, my boy, you have not eaten any breakfast yet. Are you going to live on your birthday presents?"

The child gave a glance at his mother out of his dark expressive eyes, and then fastened them again on his father, whose face was partly concealed by the *Times*, which he was reading aloud.

Ever since he was five years old he had been permitted to have his breakfast downstairs, an arrangement looked forward to as a red-letter day by nurse and the nursery party in general, and by Rex with the utmost glee, on account of the more varied entertainment downstairs, not only in the eating way, but in that of amusement, as his father was sure to talk or read for the benefit of everybody, little thinking what a deep impression he was making on his little son, or

what a strange jumble he would stir up in the imaginative enquiring mind.

The nursery had the benefit of his thoughts put in'o act, rather in a strange manner sometimes, exercising the question of "Home Rule" by grand tyranny over the infant population of the nursery as a lord of the creation, and outside the house as a landed proprietor, when in a distant meadow he built himself an Irish cabin with some loose planks which were lying in a neighbouring field, and which he made his four-year-old brother help him in carrying to his domain, frightening his nurse into fits, thinking they were stolen or drowned. Finally he watched the men at the farm go off to their dinner, made a raid on the sty, captured one of the little pigs, and bore it off in triumph. That was only a *faute de mieux*, for he had endeavoured to carry out a literal translation of the "three acres of ground and a cow," one of which he had enticed with two turnips through several fields to his own property, fenced in by the assistance of small brothers and sisters, who were regaled with a feast at the expense of "the cruel landlord," his ideas on that subject being rather misty, especially as to territorial rights, drawn perhaps from an ancient charter relative to Tom Tiddler's ground, and might best be described in his father's words regarding the great original agitators that they were in fact only the principal ingredients in a huge Irish stew.

One would think that the cow had heard of Romulus and Remus, for he displayed the same contempt for the architect and builder by leaping over the wall, quietly knocking down the hurdles with a dignified bend of his head, and actually going beyond Remus in his satire, by rolling over into a ditch the landed proprietor himself; whereupon the whole of the nursery crew ran screaming to the house, to sob out that Rex had been tossed in the upper fields, which report, like a snowball, grew in extent—that the bull was loose—Master Rex tossed—which was duly conveyed to the drawing-room

by the butler, who softened the alarm bell by muffling it; in other words, commencing, "Don't be frightened, my Lady, but the bull is loose, and Master Rex——"

Sir Roland and Lady Radcliffe were already out on the lawn, just in time to see all their household flying in every direction with rakes and ropes to catch the imaginary wild bull.

This incident was only a sample of the usual routine of Rex's past life since he came to be promoted to the family breakfast and the newspaper.

His godfather had given him an immense model of a man-of-war, which stood on tressels in a room by itself, and was treated with the greatest respect—veneration indeed—by the whole establishment, from the highest to the lowest, as it was the grand resort on a wet day; and not even the august presence of the Admiral of the Fleet could have been welcomed with greater delight; although the home fry, and that of the visitors, became at last a little tired of being so repeatedly shot and compelled to die, whether they liked it or not. However, they were soon refreshed by a grand shipwreck and a general scramble in the mighty deep to gain the far-off land.

In the meantime peace reigned over the remainder of the house even to the stairs, which took this opportunity of being waxed and polished without the maids engaged in the process being rolled over by a troop of boys precipitating themselves as a sort of human avalanche from the top landing to the dining-room floor.

Did there ever exist a boy who could manage to accomplish a simple descent or ascent? Putting aside the *glissade* on the banisters as belonging more properly to the department of home gymnastics, the most ordinary system of Rex's for coming down was that which may best be described as the flying leap—four steps at a time, with an occasional cannon against the wall to vary the monotony of the descent.

At one time his mother had a serious illness, and he was admonished by his father to go down quietly one step at a time, which he proceeded to carry out to the letter. Seizing the banisters firmly with both hands, he jumped heavily from the first step, alighting firmly upon his heels on the next, to rebound thence to the one below, and so on till he reached the very last, thereby creating the most unearthly thud, while all the time it was considered by Rex as a specially merciful method of transferring himself from one storey to another, until he arrived on the soft mat in the hall.

This particular morning upon which he is first introduced to the reader being his birthday, he had chosen the *glissade* transit to the breakfast room. Sir Roland Radcliffe was quietly descending the stair from his dressing-room, deep in a letter, when he was startled by a whirring rush on the banisters—Rex swooping down from the top flight.

"Father, it's my birthday. I am nine years old, and a shooting star."

His father clutched at him, and he alighted on his back, with his arms round his throat for a special birthday greeting.

"Anyone would think you wished it to be your last," said Sir Roland, looking into the mischievous beaming face. "If you had slipped you would have been killed. I am glad your mother did not see you. Now put your hand in my waistcoat pocket and you will find a present."

Reginald was very fond of his father, and knew too, that he owned a very warm spot in Sir Roland's heart; but close by there was another little nook that possessed a great share of Rex's affection, and that was this waistcoat pocket, always full of money—his bank, that could stand any run upon it. He remembered it from three years old, when he was permitted to dive in with baby fingers and bring out a new shiny threepence. Other pockets produced wonderful toys, but this was ever ready for an emergency—sudden desire for sweets, marbles, string for kite, or a new knife—a cojuror's repository that was never empty.

"Papa, they are all shillings this morning. How many may I take?"

"One."

Rex took it out, looking a little disappointed. "Father, it is gold; I have taken out ever so many, all gold."

"There is not any silver in that pocket. That sovereign is for you."

The boy could hardly believe it as he entered the breakfast-room holding the gold piece in his fingers.

"Mother—look. Gold, because it is my birthday."

"It is for your promised engine," said his mother, leaving the coffee to go on making itself, while she kissed and played with her boy; and then he was conducted by both parents to a certain spot behind the door, where he was duly placed under a red line, and congratulated at having grown considerably since last year, then measured again by another red stroke, which process was carried on in the Radcliffe family with all the inhabitants of the nursery, whose initials could be seen half way up the door.

"May I have a real engine that will go, mother?"

"Yes, that can take us all up to London."

"Will you be the driver, fireman, or what?"

"I will take you up to town with me," said his father. "No, not to-day; when your mother can come as well, and if you have not changed your mind by that date, we will buy it on one condition, that you never light it or set it going in the nursery unless we are present."

Sir Roland Radcliffe was soon deep in his letters, then in his newspaper, his wife in her letters, and Rex was wishing that his mother's words could come true, that he could buy an engine and go off on his travels. His father had often said "it was well to see the world early"—it made a man of a boy to rough it—and sundry other unfortunate remarks of Sir Roland's.

Boys, and girls too, but the former especially, have a queer

knack of remembering certain observations not intended for them, or not applicable to their state of being ; but anything of real benefit to their present or future character makes not the least impression ; goes in at one ear and takes a short cut out of the other, whether the cap fits or not.

A grand life was in the *Times* that morning—a life that had passed away—and there was a long article on it. Rex's attention was turned from his engine, which had just made a triumphal career across the desert, by some remarks of his father, and then he continued reading aloud :

"Both Houses look with sorrow on that vacant seat, where he was regarded on all sides as a model, type, and example in all the public and private relations of life, of what an English gentleman, of what a high-minded and public-spirited man should be ; and to think that grand career just closed commenced when other boys are only being sent to school. By his own unaided efforts he pursued an untrodden path, beating down, overcoming every obstacle, graduating in the grand school of hardship and suffering, at first by his childish love of adventure, and then by his true-hearted bravery for the sufferings of others. Through fire and water he would go if duty led the way ; blindfolded he would follow its voice, though, like the patriarch of old, it called him to forsake his home and kindred. He would climb alone the rugged mountain if there were a life to save behind it, though perhaps when he reached its summit, it was to see a yet steeper one beyond. The highest peak was gained at last, and never was the Victoria Cross won by a braver or nobler heart."

"There, Rex ; here is a hero for you and no mistake," said Sir Roland, turning his eyes for a moment from the paper, and meeting the boy's earnest fixed gaze. *Go and do likewise* ought to be the last words on that life."

"Father ! why should not I win the Victoria Cross some day ?"

"You had better try. Begin to-day ; but remember, my boy,

there must be higher achievements than acting shooting stars and other gymnastics down the front or back staircase."

"I daresay 'he' did," answered Rex, pointing at the *Times*, "for it says he was fond of blind-man's buff. I can begin to-day to copy him in that, for I think it is awfully jolly when there are a lot of us."

"Your father never read anything of the kind," laughed his mother.

"Yes, didn't you, father? You said he was blindfolded, and that could only be to play hide and seek or blind-man's buff. What do you think were his adventures when he was a boy? From what you read, I think he must have been shipwrecked and lost on a desert island. At another time he must have been trying to save people from brigands, and gone up the mountains after them. How I should have liked to have been with him. I wish he had been my godfather."

"To have left you a desert island in his will, or a mountain full of brigands as a birthday present!" laughed Sir Roland. "Perhaps you thought he could have left you his fine character without any trouble on your part to attain it."

"At any rate, Rex," interrupted his mother, "if your father writes under that beautiful life, *Go and do likewise*, you can place under it the lines you were saying to me yesterday,

" 'Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of time.' "

"Well, mother, there's another very easy thing to do. I've left footprints on the sand over and over again. Why, it is as easy to do as cutting up this ham into little bits," and Rex commenced a very practical illustration with his knife and fork.

"I think people call things difficult that are very easy. It is only that they give them long hard names."

"Evidently you think your mountains will be very easy to climb," said Sir Roland, "but remember, my boy, it is easier to slide down the banisters than up. Here is another piece of poetry you will do well to learn,

"The heights by good men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upwards in the night."

"Who was the patriarch that left his home blindfolded?"

"Abraham I suppose you mean. The article is only speaking metaphorically."

"I was only speaking 'forically,'" said Rex, anxious to keep up with his father and the article too. "If you want me to copy him—I mean the grand man in the *Times*—I shall call him 'my Captain,' or 'the General,' that will be best, and I will do as he did until I win the Victoria Cross. I mean to have it."

Then he was silent for three minutes.

"Did the 'General' have his father and mother with him do you think?"

"Not exactly," answered Sir Roland. "He went forth with a purpose, and he was soon called to give up his home to accomplish it. *Not even mothers or fathers must be thought of before a higher call.*"

Poor Sir Roland Radcliffe, how bitterly he regretted that speech before the month was out. It had gone from his mind, and one bitter day of agony and suspense his wife recalled it to him.

When they were both gone out Rex spread the *Times* on the floor, and then lay full length over one sheet while he devoured the other and read the life of his "General" carefully through, and the lines his father dwelt upon over and over again, until he knew parts of it by heart.

Finally he took a large sheet of paper and copied that

especial portion from the article, and another long paragraph from the life, writing at the end in larger letters, *Go and do likewise.*

Replacing the newspaper on the table, he stood a long time before it with a Napoleonic fold of his arms, and then uttered a few words very emphatically, which would have startled his father, and filled his mother with consternation.

"Yes, I will do it. I will do it. Father says I may, and he has often told me, 'If a thing has to be done, do it at once.' So I will go away and not come back till I win the Victoria Cross."

"Reggie!" "Rex!" in different tones. "When are you coming to play with us? You shall choose the game as it is your birthday."

"I am writing—am very busy," was the reply of "the birthday."

"You must come, Rex. We will be shipwrecked or drowned, or we will be smugglers, and you can shoot us if you like."

"Yes," added two little girls, "you may even shoot at our dolls; not at their faces though."

"Dolls!" cried the future hero. "Dolls! You forget I am a man to-day. I shall never play at dolls again. I am going to travel. Papa says I must see the world. I am going to sea. Perhaps I shall be shipwrecked in reality, and kill lions and tigers, and go up mountains and save people, and when I get to the top there will be the Queen and the Royal Family. You will all be there, and she—Her Majesty I mean—will present me with the Victoria Cross, and you will clap your hands and cry 'Hurrah!' and then she will say 'Kneel down,'—look, like this—and she will strike me with her sword."

"Oh! Rex," interrupted his sister of thirteen, "the Queen does not wear a sword."

"Well then, my sword, or a sword; and she will sing out in a loud voice, 'Rise Sir Reginald Radcliffe,' and then there will be great cheers."

"You can't be that till papa dies," said the same voice. "How wicked you are, Rex, to think of such a thing—dear papa."

"I am not killing him—I shall be made a knight on my own account, or perhaps a duke grander than papa. Not that I care about titles," added the hero, waving them off with his hand. "I should be quite sorry to have such a string as the Duke of Wellington had. I could not get half of them into my head last week—and what's more, I don't believe he knew them all himself."

"Let us go to the ship-room and act all his battles," said a six-year-old brother.

"Then we will go to the fields, for that is a proper place for him."

When Rex came in, he went to a drawer and took out his money-box. How much had he there he wondered. His father kept the key. He shook it, but not any came out. If he were to ask for the key, he would only be allowed to have it on condition that he only counted it and replaced the money in the box. How long would the sovereign last him that was given for the engine? He took a piece of paper and made a list of probable expenses, but was quite startled at the sum. He thought hotel bills, trains, food, etc., might come to ten shillings perhaps in the course of a week; but he found upon counting it up, that it was more than a sovereign. so he began to reduce his expenditure, but was called away in the middle to have a ride with his father, as a birthday treat, right away to the nearest town. At the largest shop there was an engine, a model not intended for sale; but the owner, knowing Sir Roland as an old customer, offered to let him have it at fifteen shillings. That was cheap, he knew, for so large a size, and asked his boy which he would choose, "A

bird in the hand," certainly larger or "two in the bush," decidedly smaller, thinking he would be sure to decide on the one before him, and was surprised when, without any hesitation, he said he preferred to wait for the other, which, in his own mind, meant the great, big reality.

His father thought that no doubt the visit to London was part of the attraction, but he little dreamt in which way. As they rode back, Rex was wondering if the scenes that had grown with him would look the same when he saw them again; would the road be all shady, on account of the young trees having become old, with thick branches? Would there be many more houses on the Heath? Would the boys be grown into men? And what about his father, looking now so tall and handsome, would he be old, or perhaps—— Rex gulped the thought down, and flew off to another.

"Father, how long would a sovereign last you?"

"That depends on circumstances; an hour, a day, or a week."

"Not longer?"

"If I were going by train it might last a few hours. If I were on a long voyage, it might not be required for six months perhaps; but if I were in London with you children, I should not have a farthing of it left in less than an hour."

"How long do you think it lasted my new godfather, the 'General?'"

"I doubt if he began life with as much. You may be quite sure he had never enough to buy engines in his boyhood, they were not invented either."

"How did people get about?"

"That is just what they did not do, they travelled very little; you can go now for a few pence what would have cost your 'General,' at your age, pounds."

"What is the cheapest tour I could take for a few pence?"

"The cheapest tour," laughed his father. "Well, I think if you take the penny omnibus from Charing Cross to the

Bank, then walk down Cannon Street, past the Monument ; take another penny trip—in a boat this time—till you arrive at Greenwich ; then have a ride on one of their steeds, a penny across the park on a donkey, that is the cheapest excursion I know. But mind you do not stay longer than five minutes on it or you will have to pay sixpence. Poor donkeys."

"Oh ! could I do all that, go all that way ? Why, it is only threepence !"

"Yes, and more too ; but you see, you would have to come back again, so with the exception of the donkey, you would have to take a return ticket."

"Then what a long way I could go for a pound ; think, father, what a heap of threepennies there are in that. Why, I could see a great deal of the world for that sovereign—more than my 'General.'"

"When your cousin Alaric comes for the holidays, you can both go up with me to Charing Cross, and while I am at the Admiralty, you can go that trip, and meet me at my club afterwards. You may change your route another day to Hampstead Heath—an equally cheap excursion—and strong-minded steeds that have a will of their own."

"Father, you are only laughing at me ; that is not seeing the world."

"Well, I read the account of the last Bank Holiday, and it said that all the world seemed on Hampstead Heath."

"Donkeys are only for babies," said Rex contemptuously. "There are not any lions and tigers on the Heath. The 'General' would never have gone there to save lives."

"I expect that is just where he did go, and on purpose to save the lives of the donkeys. Yes, quite true, my boy. He went to save the donkeys you despise, and the donkey-boy too."

"Do you really mean it, father ?"

"Yes. He held a prominent position in the Society for

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and it led him there to see how that poor ill-used animal was treated ; and then he found out that the donkey-boy was more neglected still, that although there seemed missions for every class of mankind, the donkey-boy had been left out in the cold, and he took them in hand as far as he could, and never rested until it was taken up by others."

"I think his name ought to have been 'General Do-good,'" said Rex thoughtfully.

"If you want lions and tigers, you and Alaric had better go to the Zoological Gardens."

"I didn't mean those in cages. I mean those out in the world, in India and Africa," said Rex, with a toss of his head.

"You need not go so far to meet lions and tigers. You will find plenty in the world this side the sea. I hope *you* will be a lion some day. You must fight your own lions and tigers first ; begin with the little cubs, until you gradually grow into the great brave lion like the 'Gencral.'"

"Oh, I see," said Rex, with a spring in his saddle that quite startled the pony. You are only speaking like you did at breakfast, 'forically,' but I mean real things."

"So do I," said his father ; "a very great reality. Now we will have a real race, and see who will reach the Lodge gates first."

And so they did, and Rex won, which made him very elated. He thought it a good beginning for his birthday. He meant always to win. He stood for some moments silent beside his pony, then he threw his arms round his neck and buried his head in the mane to hide his tears. He would not have liked his faithful little steed to have seen him act the baby ; but he walked with him all the way to the stables, and gave him two lumps of sugar. Then he went home, up to his room, and took out a change of linen. He was afraid to put it up as a parcel then for fear someone might come in and

see it—that would do when he went to bed ; but he could collect some of his property and have it ready, such as his knife, string, a few marbles, etc., that would not excite suspicion. He was not sure that he could get off when he intended to-morrow morning, having important business to transact—the “General” had done the same—make his Will, and arrange his future expenses as well as might be feasible, hoping that he might be fortunate enough to extract another sovereign out of the money-box. There were some special articles of property that were very precious to Rex. How he wished he could take them with him ; and counted on his fingers ways and means.

No, no ! it was not possible to do it. How could he travel over the world with his three greatest treasures : his pony, his violin, and his money-box. He would be known by one of them, let alone all three. It would be a delightful existence to scamper over the country on “Beauty,” but she might be stolen while he was asleep ; or he might be advertised as, “Lost, a boy on a pony,” and be ignominiously brought back. What an awful disgrace ; he must avoid that at any cost. And then he laughed at his own stupid idea of ever dreaming that he could take his violin. Fancy seeing on a poster, “Lost, a boy with a pony and violin ;” or, perhaps he might be mentioned last, for one day, when his father was very angry with him for riding him too far, he said, “Beauty was worth far more than he was,” so it no doubt would be printed, “Lost, a pony with a boy and violin on it.” That would be more dreadful still, especially if they added the great sum of “Twenty pounds reward,” which would be intended for the pony, not for him. He must save himself such a mortification at any cost. These contemplations were suddenly brought to an end by the sound of the gong, and he remembered it was his birthday, and that he was to dine downstairs, and his eldest sister three years older ; so he plunged into another jacket, made a rapid toilet, and by

taking a *glissade* down the banisters, arrived just in time for grace.

"Well, Rex," said his mother, when the soup was being removed, "what makes you so silent? Is the great age you have reached to-day weighing on your mind?"

"The race he won with me ran away with his tongue," laughed his father.

Rex had been working out another problem, and making his Will.

"I wish you would be quiet like that when I am learning my lessons," said his sister from the other side of the table.

"I never talk until I have got to the end of mine."

"You are so slow. I learn three lessons while you are poring over one."

"Father, what do you think the 'General' valued most?"

"Landed or personal?" asked Sir Roland.

"Decidedly personal he means, I expect," answered his mother.

"Yes, mother; you have guessed what I mean. His personal property when a boy," said Rex slowly, fearing to be too explicit.

"I daresay it tells you in the reminiscences of his early life—they were written some time ago—with anecdotes of his boyhood."

"Oh! father!" cried Rex, letting his knife and fork fall in his astonishment. "You don't mean to say there is more about him than in the *memoirs* and the great book."

"Yes. What I was reading this morning relates to his life and adventures after he was thirty, and to his great achievements and crowning wonders for the sake of his country and fellow men; but you will find the small book I mean in the library, on the third shelf in the corner, next the three volumes in dark grey and gold."

This set Rex thinking again. What if he could take that with him, and perhaps go through the same adventures,

He dare not take it. No, that would be stealing. He would put off his departure for another day, and write out certain portions——

"Rex, how stupid you are; you are not a bit like a 'birthday,'" exclaimed his sister, standing up for a moment to have a better look at him over the flowers. "Mamma says we may always think of fun on our birthdays."

"That's just what I'm doing."

"No you're not. You are thinking of the life of some old man who happened to win a lot of battles, and who, I think, had much better have remained at home, than gone about fighting and killing people; and besides, we have enough of that in history. I hope you will never grow up like that or I shall never love you a bit. I can trust Freddie to take care of my dolls, even when they are ill, he gives them their medicine every ten minutes, and makes beautiful mustard plasters; but you I would not trust them with for five minutes, I should find one beheaded, and the other shot.

"Poor Katie. I fear your waxen pets have a hard life between your two brothers, with their soldier and doctor proclivities."

"Yes, mother dear. They have a most unhappy life. I shall be very glad when Rex goes to school. I do not like having a brother who is always committing murder—it does not sound well in the family."

"No, nor in the peerage, where we come in," added her father. "I quite agree."

"Ah! You will be very sorry when I do go away," said Rex, significantly. "You and your tribe of dolls will all cry your eyes out, and put on mourning."

"Indeed, we shall do nothing of the kind. The day you go to school we shall all be dressed in the brightest colours, with flowers and feathers, like mother goes to the Drawing Room. Bits of ribbon stuck about everywhere, and flags flying all over the house, even out of the tops of the chimneys."

"Is that how you were arrayed at the last Drawing Room, my love?" enquired Sir Roland, with a very comic look at his wife. "No wonder you created a sensation. I am sorry the Foreign Office prevented my even seeing you from a distance, which would certainly have lent enchantment to the view."

The door opened at this moment to admit the nursery party for their grand birthday treat, coming down to dessert and fun, in the course of which Rex was told to fetch his violin; he had already gone beyond his sister in progress, and he could sing too, so they had wonderful duets—Sir Roland with his flute and Lady Radcliffe at the piano. Then the children were allowed to choose, and some very funny things were sung and played; afterwards games.

"Now some more music," said Lady Roland, "and then my birdies must go to their nest, it is very late. Choose."

"Let us have 'When shall we three meet again?'" said one.

But somehow those words gave Rex a start, and he felt uncomfortable.

"No," he said, "that's bosh, it's only the silly old witches song. Let mother and father choose."

"Then we will have 'Home, sweet Home,'" said Lady Radcliffe, "that is always one of our birthday songs."

That was still worse; and when his father's deep rich voice, and his mother's sweet one, with the little trebles blended, it was all he could do to stay where he was. Fight against them as he might, the silly, obstinate tears would come. So he took his baby brother up, and sat down with him behind those standing around the piano. How he ever remembered this scene—how the echo of those soft notes seemed to rise over stormy waves, and in the silence of a far-off land. Sir Roland and Lady Radcliffe little thought it would be long ere they could sing that song again.

"Let us have 'Little Travellers,'" asked Katie.

"And den 'I'n a 'ittle Pilgrim,'" lisped a four-year-old—

while Rex thought how strange it was that they should all choose "travelling," "going away," and "home."

"Now, Rex, 'birthday-boy,' choose the last," said his mother.

"Oh, just what you and father like," replied he quickly.

"No, my boy, you choose."

"The one you sang last Sunday then, and told me to learn."

"Heavenly Father, send Thy blessing
On our children gathered here;
May they all Thy name confessing,
Be to Thee for ever dear.
Spread Thy golden pinions o'er them,
Holy Spirit from above:
Guide them, lead them, go before them,
Give them peace, and joy, and love."

It was a new hymn, and the children's voices soon ceased.

"Roland, let us sing this last verse especially for our birthday-son and heir. Listen all of you."

And again went forth those touching pleading notes, in deeper, richer, sweeter strain. "Listen." No need to say that to Rex—with his mother's loving eyes full of tears of hope and joy bent upon him; and his father's strong arm of proud, protecting love and care, right round him. Those last two lines seemed rivetted on his mind with a hundred nails:

"Guide him, lead him, go before him,
Give him peace, and joy, and love."

But he didn't fully realize all that to-night—of course not. It was only a soft cement that was binding those words on his heart—just loosely knitted together, that pre-determined plans might unravel and break. It was only when he had wrenched himself out of that loving grasp, and from the sight of those tender, watchful eyes, that the rivetting process began. When

in dark days, and darker nights ; when on tempestuous waves, and on the isles beyond the seas, those words, that heart-breathed prayer, came back with such power.

The minute after dinner Rex had darted into the library, and in the spot indicated by his father found a small softly-bound book—" *Multum in Parvo*."

"Father, is this the book about my 'General?' What a queer title!" cried he, racing up the stairs to the drawing-room.

"Yes, that is it, old boy, and that means that great things were done by a little body. The boy was father to the man."

"That's more queer than the title. I thought a man was father to the boy ; fancy my being your father," and Reggie gave a commanding look up at the six-foot figure before him.

"Oh, Rex, don't talk such rubbish," said Katie, "come and join in this game."

The "birthday" waved her off with supreme contempt.

"I am only speaking to father about what you do not understand."

"I suppose you mean 'forically' as usual?"

"Yes, metaphysical reasoning, that you will grow into."

"Rex, come over here."

"Wait till I have done 'physic' with father, you children."

"Taking nasty 'physic' medicine on your birthday?" exclaimed the little group. "Mother said me am never to have nothing nasty on birthdays."

"We must all play, Rex, that is evident," laughed his father, taking up a four-year-old on his shoulder.

"Yes, papa—poor Rex—don't give him cator-oil on his bufday, dec'ly after dinner."

When they were all panting, and Sir Roland had thrown himself back in an arm-chair—after having been an elephant conveying the whole of the nursery tribe across the desert of Sahara—Rex crept behind him.

"What does the title mean—really?"

"Its real translation means, 'What great things even

a boy can achieve who wills to do it.' Here, give it to me."

Sir Roland took it to a side table for a few moments, then brought it back and drew his boy to his side and handed it him.

"There—read."

"Reginald Radcliffe, from his father on his ninth birthday. *Go and do likewise.*"

"Presents all day—dear old father," were Rex's words, with a great hug, then beginning to devour it.

"Remember, Rex, your 'General,' though a brave boy, was a very tender and feeling one. I do not think he would ever have made his sisters unhappy by shooting their dolls. He was a most gallant little fellow, a thorough gentleman, and was known to go through much danger to save and protect poor little children from rude boys. He was a great friend to little girls, so what must he have been to his sisters, and you may be quite sure he never teased animals. If you make him your rule of life and obey the 'Articles of War' that I think are written there, you may turn into a grand character some day."

Rex was very tired when he went to bed from the excitement of the day, so he put off packing till the next, and never wrote down what he had thought of concerning his will at dinner. He began to think again when he got into bed, but went off to sleep instead, and never woke until it was quite late.

He was very quiet at breakfast, and glad that his father was not reading aloud but absorbed in a "debate," and his mother deep in a long, foreign letter—for he wanted to think out a lot, not only about his will, but things that had been read at prayers a little puzzling. Generally he used to ask his mother when she gathered them together for their own little Bible reading after breakfast in her morning-room, and puzzled her with his queer questions; but to-day, when he

most wanted to know, he dare not, for he could not explain why.

His father generally read "Ryle's Commentary," sometimes a reviewing explanation of his own. To-day there had been a little of both. He was always told to listen very attentively, as there was sure to be some little message or lesson for him, if only a word to carry out during the day, of love or obedience. Now there seemed to be no end of messages, lessons, calls, and words, that were evidently just meant for him at this important crisis of his life. Like Abraham, he was

led to go forth from his home, not knowing whither he went, but would be told as he travelled on, so need take very little luggage, as all his needs would be supplied; that he would have great adventures, and in the end meet with a grand reward, which, of course, would be the Victoria Cross. That he was to hate even his father and mother (though only by comparison, which Sir Roland explained) if they came between and prevented his obeying the far higher call, and thus fulfilling his grand career of conquering and saving lives, and so reaching his grand destiny.

Sir Roland put down the *Times*, asked for some more coffee, and went on with his breakfast—Rex watching him intently.

"Father, have you made your will?"

Sir Roland started up and looked at himself in the glass.

"Agnes, do I look anything peculiar this morning?" asked he of his wife. "Rex has been staring at me for the last ten minutes, and now asks in the gravest of voices, as if he were an undertaker, if I have made my will. Would you like to feel my pulse, sir?" added he, stretching out his hand.

"The 'General' says you can never begin too early to make your will, it's a duty you owe to your family. Here—it is, I'm sitting on it."

And Rex produced his valued present with several markers already in it.

"Yes, father, I quoted correctly, as you say. Listen! 'a

duty to your family and society at large. Many a man has had the intention of making a will, and ended by dying without one. Many procrastinate and are overtaken with serious illness affecting the head and brain, which causes it to be disputed, involving their family in Chancery and ruin. Therefore make your will while yet young and in full vigour."

"What's 'crastinate,' father?"

"Pro—crasti—nate," said a voice at the window. "Don't read such long-worded rubbish."

"Go away, Katie. Papa and I are talking of what girls know nothing about."

"It seems to me I know more about it than you do, considering you pronounce that long word only half, and as if you were grinding your teeth. If boys can make wills, girls can. But they can't, it is only old men who make wills just before they die."

"That is years too late; we are to make it now while we are young."

"We—we—we," laughed the little voice at the window, "then I will make one, and leave you all the dolls you have broken and blinded, and that's all—as a punishment," and he ran away.

"You may be glad to hear, Rex, as you are so anxious on the subject, that I have followed the advice of the 'General' and made my will long ago."

"Did you, father? Then you have not 'crastinated,' but——"

"But what, Rex?"

"Nothing, father—exactly. I was only thinking what a rich man you are—but, I hope—I hope, you won't die so rich."

"That you may be a poor man, and have to work hard and provide for the family—eh, Rex?"

"No, father dear, I was not thinking of that—though of course I should. But you were reading this week that it was easier for a camel to go through a needle into Heaven, than

for a rich man to get there ; so of course I hope you won't die rich. Please don't go away, either of you, I want you."

Sir Roland and his wife were exchanging glances with their mouths all of a quiver, but they had not any time to speak before their small piece of quicksilver had flashed out of the room and back again with a large sheet of blue-looking office paper. Going to a side table he brought pen and ink, which he placed in the hand of his father.

"Will you and mother write your names down there, please? I have been looking at that book you were reading last week, 'Every man his own lawyer,' and I see a will has to be signed by two witnesses, so will you and the mater sign your names—look, just there?"

"But this is only a blank sheet of paper, my boy, with not any will to witness to. You have not written it yet, and signed it, that is what we are to witness—your own signature to your own last will and testament."

Rex's face was all of a pucker.

"I have not made up my mind yet as to my property, so I thought if you could just put your names there, I could fill it up when I was ready at—before—I—at any time."

"Go and tell Styles to send round the carriage with the horses behind instead of in front," said Lady Radcliffe.

"Mother, you don't mean it, you are both laughing, and so would Styles."

"That is only what you are doing—cart or carriage before the horses."

"I see," said Rex ; and again he darted at the side table and brought two books. "Old or New Testament, father? Am I to sign with my hand on it?"

"No, Rex, put those back again. A will is called by that name. You write your wishes concerning your property, and then we will sign it, though you cannot do it legally, until you are of age."

"But if I were—to go—if I were to die soon," hesitated

Rex, "I do not want the children to fight over my things. You and mother will see them divided rightly. I will make you executor," concluded he with the emphasis in the wrong place, and as it was ever after pronounced in the family in loving remembrance of the little testator—often in a painful minor, though now received with a peal of laughter which rather disconcerted him.

"I thought you said making a will was a serious concern," said he, as he left the room.

His mother's face clouded and she gave a very audible sigh.

"I wish he would not say and do such peculiar things that would never enter the head of any other boy, and I am always overhearing nurse ejaculating 'that boy is too clever to live by half.' I am always afraid of those boys who are continually thinking and drawing such conclusions."

"The mother of a few dozen of our great men I daresay thought the same," replied Sir Roland, "but you see they lived to carry out their early proclivities and idiosyncracies, and, please God, so may our Rex; but I fancy he will be wilful and have to find out his own mistakes. He will try to go through a stone wall to reach an end in view. He will make his mark in the world if he lives; either in a diplomatic, military, or legal career."

"He will get to the top of the ladder which ever way it is," said Lady Radcliffe. "Which would you rather see him, Roland, a judge, a general, or an M.P.?"

"I will tell you when he is thirteen. He is mad on the 'General' just now."

"Well, I hope he will be an out-and-out good man—that is the main thing," concluded his mother.

The beloved object of this speculation and solicitude was up a tree in the wood, quite hidden from view, armed with "Every man his own lawyer," and was busy making his will. Then he wrote to his father and mother, all in pencil—as he had been forbidden to climb trees with ink in his pocket, it having

resulted in an upset more than once, not only to the ink, but himself, in his endeavours to grasp it, to say nothing of the damage done to his clothes.

In the afternoon, when his parents were out, he copied all he had written in ink, and placed them in a large envelope. Then he spent about an hour over his money-box, and managed in that time to at last shake out a great many farthings, several pence, a few shillings, and two sovereigns, so with the one intended for his engine that made three pounds—not at all bad to begin the world with; then he referred to the “General,” yes, more than he seemed to have. “Ah—I see what he did with his.” Going into the nursery, he possessed himself of a needle and cotton, and undoing the lining of his jacket, fastened them in.

He hoped there were not any people coming to dinner, so that he might have his parents to himself this last evening, when there was a violent peal at the bell. Rex peeped as the butler went to the door, and saw it was a telegram, and that the man was opening it.

“Master Rex, your papa and mamma are not coming home to-night, they are going to stay at Croft Hall until to-morrow, when they will be home to dinner,” and the butler went in to the servants’ hall with the communication.

Rex felt as if some one had given him a great blow; then he curled himself up in his father’s arm-chair in the library, and burst into tears.

“Oh, my poor father and mother, will they ever see me again?” What great big kisses he had intended giving them that night, returning, when they thought he had gone to bed, to give them one last fond hug. He was very quiet at the nursery tea, indeed, quite attentive to his sisters and little brothers, that they even confided a doll to his care, which was returned with both its eyes unmolested.

“I wonder what has come over him,” said the head nurse to the under one; “he is so meek, and tame, not one bit like

hissself. I do hope he is not sickening for the measles. Once get them worriting things into the house, and there's no knowing when they will get out again."

He finished all his packing before he went to bed. A very tidy package in a strap lay upon the chair, and then he arranged his plans for next day.

"Abraham left his home not knowing whither he went," said he to himself; "but I suppose he knew his first move. I must take a ticket for somewhere; but I don't think it shall be London just yet. I'll get out at Tetsley, I need not start so early as I thought, they will all be late to-morrow."

Suddenly he sprang up and softly opened the door. There was not a sound. The servants were enjoying themselves far away, and he walked into his mother's bedroom. He wanted to say his prayers there to-night. He fancied he was very happy, but the moonbeams reflected a little white figure kneeling by the side of the bed with his curly head buried in his hands, sobbing bitterly. When he went back to bed, he wondered if they would be very angry with him, or very miserable. Supposing he should be ill or killed somehow. How his mother would cry when he was brought home dead. How his coffin would be covered with white flowers like that of a little sister who died; and how they all went to the churchyard, crying so much, and he was sure they would be much more wretched about him, though he did tease them. Yes, even his father would cry over his grave, that was comforting after all; though he sobbed himself to sleep at the idea, and dreamt that he was chief mourner at his own funeral.

Rex had intended leaving very early in the morning; but as his parents were away, there would not be any necessity for so doing, so he might as well have a proper breakfast. The things were all laid, but not anyon was there; so he ate as much as he could. He was not hungry. However, he cut himself some thick sandwiches for dinner.

He often did that when he went with his carrier pigeons a little way down the line, where they were often kept for him by the son of the station-master. He did not like to venture into the night-nursery, it was better not, for he had given a last kiss to his baby brothers the night before. The last thing he took from under his mattress his will, and his letter to his father, folded in a long official envelope, which, though he much preferred bright red, he sealed with black, as more appropriate to a will, and the circumstances attending it. Then he took it into his father's dressing-room, and was about placing it on his toilet-glass, but he remembered the servants would first see it—that would never do. No. He would put it in his Bible; that was the proper place for a will, being called a testament.

Finally, he went into their bedroom, and knelt down where he had done over-night, and asked God to bless and take care of his father and mother, and to bless him and take care of him and make him like the "General." And then he stood before the two portraits he loved so much; a fine little fellow he looked, so tall for his age, with his package in one hand, and his great coat over his arm. Perhaps he saw a look of reproach in the loving eyes bent down on him, or there was something strange in his own, for he felt if he gave much longer he should not go at all. The "General" would not have been such a baby. So he shook his head proudly, brushed his hand across his eyes, and rushed out of the room, stood and listened at the top of the stairs, then ran down across the lawn into the wood, turning for a moment at a little gate, where a full view of the house could be seen, with his own bedroom window. Another minute, and he was out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

MISSING—LOST.

A BRILLIANTLY lighted room ; guests were entering from the dining-room, it was a dinner-party ; but there was to be a large assembly for the ball later on. A lady and gentleman paused on the staircase.

"You have been looking very pale all dinner-time, Nora. You ought not to have come so soon after your illness."

"People do not like the symmetry of their tables spoilt by one absenting themselves at the last, and even if you give time, no one likes being asked to eat dinner for somebody else ; besides, Mrs. Lascelles sent me a 'special,' hoping I should be certain to come."

"I don't care," replied her husband, "your health is of far more importance. I will not have you go into that heated drawing-room, that will soon be crammed. You have been within an ace of rheumatic fever ; that ought to have been a sufficient excuse for anybody. Sit in this recess behind the curtain, and I shall go and ferret out Mrs. Lascelles, and tell her I am going to take you home."

"You forget, the carriage will not be here for hours—three at least."

"No matter, there will be plenty of cabs," and Colonel Desmond followed a crowd into the drawing-room, but it was some time before he succeeded in approaching his hostess near enough to whisper his polite excuses for leaving so early.

An intimate friend was near.

"Take your wife home in our carriage," said he. "We are going to stay after all. Tell my coachman not to be here till two."

"That is just the time we ordered ours, so we had better change carriages, that is all."

And so Colonel and Mrs. Desmond arrived at home in their friend's carriage at 11 p.m., instead of 9 a.m. Having his latch key, they let themselves in. He went into his smoking-room and his wife upstairs.

Mrs. Desmond was a considerate mistress, she never kept her maid up to attend her on her return from a late party. To-night, however, she rang her bell and waited, thinking she might be at her supper.

"I will go and have a look at baby."

She went up the nursery stairs, all was quiet; her maid's bedroom door was open, evidently she had not gone to bed. Then she passed on to the nursery. Why was the gas out?

"Nurse! nurse!"

No answer. Not a sound. What did she mean by going down to her supper, and leaving baby alone? "Is that what she does when we are out? It is too bad"—she groped her way to the cot and put out her hand to feel if the little occupant were safe. The cot was empty.

Presently the nursery bell pealed through the house. Not any sound came up the back stairs, or the front. Failing to find the matches Mrs. Desmond descended to her bedroom, hoping to find her maid, but she was not there. Putting up the gas, she was surprised to see several of her evening dresses on the bed, she had certainly never had them out when she dressed for the dinner party. Flowers were also scattered about. What a strange time for her maid to choose to arrange her things. Again a bell was sharply rung, then Mrs. Desmond descended to her husband and told him.

"You may depend upon it they are all up to high jinks

downstairs, and never heard the bell," laughed the Colonel, giving a tremendous peal that set two others ringing, and brought his own man up the stairs three at a time.

His scared face was a study at the sight of his master and mistress home, without being fetched, full three hours before they were expected.

"Why were not the bells answered when I rang from upstairs?" enquired Mrs. Desmond.

"Thought it was a trick of—of one of the maids, ma'am," faltered the man.

"Why did Banks take baby downstairs?"

"Baby is not there, ma'am."

"Then she is on her bed, I suppose. I never thought of looking there, or that she would leave her by herself in the dark; it is too bad. Send her up instantly to light the gas, and tell Annette to go at the same time and tidy my room. She has no business to go down to supper and leave it like she has."

The man turned red, and then whiter than he was before—began to speak—half went out of the room, then returned and nervously took up his master's gloves.

"Well, Smart, why have you come back again? Go and give my order," said Mrs. Desmond impatiently.

"I don't require you," said the Colonel, eyeing the man narrowly.

He looked at his master, then at his mistress

"They are out, sir?"

"Nurse and my maid both out at the same time? What servant has been minding baby?"

"I—I am not sure, ma'am. I don't know."

Mrs. Desmond was determined she would know, and, ordering the man to send up the housekeeper to her room, again ascended to the nursery, this time with a light.

"Baby, my darling, are you awake I wonder?" said she, walking up to the cot; and then, turning towards the nurse's

bed, she gave a half scream, and ran down calling to her husband.

"George, George, baby is nowhere to be seen! Bond," cried she, encountering the housekeeper, "where is baby? What does all this mean?"

"I do not know, ma'am. I thought she was safe upstairs with her nurse until Smart came down. They have taken her."

"You have no business to allow them to go out without leave. Have they ever taken baby with them before?"

"Not with my knowledge," said Mrs. Bond in a very perturbed manner.

"How long has this kind of thing been going on?" enquired Colonel Desmond. "Is this what takes place whenever we are out? Who is in the house at this present moment?"

"Only the housekeeper, butler, and the kitchen-maid."

Where the rest had gone neither master or mistress could discover, but they were determined to find out. Suddenly an idea entered the head of the Colonel. He opened the street door and listened, it was very quiet. Presently, through the stillness, came the measured tread of a policeman. Colonel Desmond went out, closing the door after him, and met the defender of the peace a few doors down. The man touched his hat.

"Have you been near, or passed my house this evening?"

"Yes, sir, two or three times."

"Did you notice anyone going in or out?"

"Yes, sir. I saw you and your lady get into the carriage at a quarter before eight, I noticed particularly."

"Why? Did you see any more leave?"

"Yes, sir. When your carriage came back a party appeared at the door, and I saw by the larking way they had with the coachman, that they were servants; they all got in, the ladies and the females inside, and a young man on the box."

"Like their impudence," muttered the Colonel.

"I fancied something was not quite right, sir, for one of them had a strange-looking bundle."

"The baby," interrupted the Colonel. "My wife is in an awful state about it. You see we were at a dinner, and left early instead of remaining for the ball."

"Yes, sir, I saw you come home in a strange carriage."

"Of course you have no idea where they went?"

"Well, yes, sir. I have more than an idea, I know; for you see, sir, your servants generally *do* go out directly after you goes, but to-night I thought it looked a bit out of the common, and, while I was thinking, who should cross the street but one of the force not on duty, so I beckons him and told him there seemed rummy goings on at your house, and could he follow that carriage of yours, and see where it was going to land all that gentry. So he jumps into a cab and follows, and it drove right off to the Rink. They have a ball on there to-night, and 'No. 13' heard one say to the coachman, 'Mind you come round and fetch us before you go for the master.'"

"A very disgraceful business, I wish I knew where to find them all," said Colonel Desmond.

"Do ye, sir? Perhaps I can help you," and the man gave a peculiar long, low whistle, which was answered round a corner.

"That's the very man, sir—'13,' I thought he was not very far off."

The two policemen met, and said a few words, then came up to Colonel Desmond.

"'13' can take you, sir, if you're ready to go at once."

The Colonel said he would be out again in a few moments, re-entered his house, and ran upstairs to his wife's room.

"Annette has gone off in one of my dresses," exclaimed she, "I cannot find it anywhere, neither the flowers to match."

"They are gracing a ball, my love, at the Rink;" and he told her all.

"Is it possible they have been going on in this disgraceful

manner month after month," said Mrs. Desmond, with her eyes full of angry tears. "My precious baby, no wonder she so often has a cold. It will be a nice surprise they will get. Yes, George, of course I am going as well. I shall only be in a fever here; the policeman will take good care of us. I shall put on this deep cloak. Come along, I have not kept you."

Colonel and Mrs. Desmond left the house without anyone knowing, found their guide some little way off, and there got into a cab and drove off to the Rink.

"I know what I will do, I will get that man to find out where baby is," said Mrs. Desmond; "I will run away with it, and they shall have a fine fright."

So the Colonel spoke to the man who was on the box, and he, after giving a peculiar nod to the policeman guarding the door, ran up the stairs, and after a short time came down with a small bundle, which he placed in Mrs. Desmond's lap, and they drove off.

"Rolling the poor little darling up in this manner, it is enough to stifle her to death."

"I was just thinking which it was most like, a sausage roll or a mummy," said the Colonel. "As the windows are shut it may be permitted to breathe."

"Twisting a great shawl round you, my duckie, far too heavy. Oh, George!" cried Mrs. Desmond, as a flash of light came into the carriage, "I am sure this is not Dorothy—look, it is not her dear little face. Stop the cab—stop!"

But instead of doing so, Colonel Desmond burst into a fit of laughter.

"Are you quite sure?" he at last managed to get out. "It seems too ridiculous. Wait for another lamp—here hold her up."

"I know my own child without lamps. How can you be so stupid to go on laughing? Look, George, it has dark hair, is younger than ours; there, it has opened its eyes—not our Dora's blue ones—no occasion to take off its hood to see her

special mark. Stop the cab," and Mrs. Desmond commenced thundering at the glass, which made the coachman stop.

"Why did you not notice before?" said her husband in a vexed tone. "We shall look such idiots going back to say we have run away with somebody else's child."

"How was I to know this was a babies' party?" answered his wife, between laughing and crying.

"No. 13" had great trouble and difficulty to keep his countenance, when it was explained to him, and the Colonel felt still more vexed when he heard the man indulging in a good laugh at their expense.

"You had better come with me, sir," said "No. 13" to Colonel Desmond; "there are several children upstairs, and some more babies in another room, and you can just pick yours out."

They were standing at the entrance of a passage debating. The Colonel turned a serio-comic look at his wife.

"I think you had better come too, Nora, I might make a mistake, they look so exactly alike when together, just like peas in a pod."

"Is it possible you do not know your own child, nearly a year old? Oh, George, and you see her ever so long every day."

"I always know her at home, dear," said her husband, apologetically, "and even if I meet her out, provided she is not with a strange nurse. Come along, dear, you were not so clever yourself after all, I thought mothers knew their own children by the touch."

"No. 13" was leading the way upstairs. They entered a small room with broad shelves, and pegs hung with hats and cloaks; on the lowest shelf were several babies, more or less muffled up. One had just awoke crying, and was being rocked in a cradle by a very young girl. Colonel and Mrs. Desmond made a careful survey of the little group, the former being very careful how he thought any one of them their own.

"Where can she be?" cried his wife, when they turned from the last.

"Are you looking for your baby, lady?" asked the small attendant.

"Yes. Are there any more besides these?"

"Don't you know the room where you left her when you went in to the dancing?"

"I have not been in to the dancing. It is my nurse who has dared to bring my child here."

"Some of 'em have been fetched away, maybe yours," replied the girl.

"That is very likely," said Colonel Desmond; "the servants may have gone home."

"There was only that one in the other room," said "13."

"Would you like to look in at the dancers and see if you can recognize your servants, sir? There is a small gallery here."

He opened a door and they looked down on the crowd beneath.

"Why, if that is not Annette in my blue silk dress," presently exclaimed Mrs. Desmond, "yes, flowers and all. I never knew such shameful proceedings."

"Is not that nurse standing near the door," enquired Colonel Desmond, "look, to the right—near that woman in yellow?"

"Yes, yes, come with me. Oh, where is my baby?"

The next minute they were at the entrance of the hall, and there was the nurse laughing and talking. The next instant she gave a scream, as she felt a violent grasp of the arm, and the voice of her mistress,

"What have you done with baby, you wicked girl?"

Behind her she saw her master. Trembling from head to foot she followed her mistress, while her partner turned to a friend,

"Come away, I've had enough of this; that woman told me she was Miss Stanley, of Eaton Place."

"Baby is quite safe, ma'am," said the nurse in a fright, as she saw their escort now increased to two officials and three policemen, besides "No. 13."

"Where is she, Banks?" enquired the Colonel. "In here, sir, was the answer," going into the room where search had already been made:

"No she is not, we have looked right along that shelf."

"No, it was over here," faltered the girl, throwing aside a heap of cloaks and shawls on the other side the room.

"I did place it here, indeed I did," cried the nurse, bursting into tears. "Oh, please, sir, don't give me in charge; she is safe somewhere."

"Somewhere is nowhere. How often have you brought your charge here?" asked her master sternly.

"Several times, sir," faltered Banks, "and she has always been in a beautiful sleep."

"Beautiful sleep, indeed," repeated her mistress. "I never expected I was placing my confidence in such an unprincipled woman."

"Are you looking for a baby in a blue frock?" asked the girl at the cradle.

"No," said Mrs. Desmond, "of course she was in her night-dress at this time of night."

"No," interrupted the nurse, "she was in a blue frock and her blue shoes. I kept them on so that I might know her in a minute, in case she got mixed up with the others, and also to keep her nice and warm. Where is she, Sally?—be quick."

"That baby was taken away more than an hour ago by a woman I thought was her mother. She said, 'Come along, my precious, it's time you were in bed.'"

"Had you ever seen her before?" asked the policeman.

"I think so, with this same child, in red shoes at times. She made a great fuss over it, and though awake, it went away with her quite good."

"She has stolen it," cried Mrs. Desmond, sinking into a

chair and bursting into tears. "Oh, my baby, my lovely little Dorothy."

"We shall find her, lady, do not fear," said "13." The dress and shoes will be a guide. It would be more difficult had she only been in her nightgown."

"You had better take your lady home, sir," said the other policeman. "We are going to make enquiries at once of those at the door, taking that girl Sally with us. Is there anything particular, madam, by which we can distinguish your child?"

"Yes, fortunately," said Mrs. Desmond, trying to calm herself. "She has deep blue eyes, quite violet, and black lashes and eyebrows, though light hair, and at the back at the top of her head is one little lock of quite white hair; that will serve to recognize her, will it not?"

"Perfectly," said "13," "that is a wonderful clue for us; for, although there are many babies with eyes like hers, we might go all over the world to find two with a lock of white hair. So take heart, lady, you will have your little one to-morrow, no doubt, perhaps to-night, but I can't promise that."

"It will be all right, Norah," said her husband. "Come home, dear, perhaps we shall find her there; it was a trick played on our servants."

They asked many questions of the men down at the doors, but the answers were the same as the policemen's; so many children were carried in and out, it was impossible to distinguish, they were generally all muffled up. The woman they did not know by Sally's description, so she was taken off to the police-station to give information, and Colonel and Mrs. Desmond drove home—alas, to find no baby, as she fondly hoped.

It was not until early morning that she was persuaded to take a little rest, and then she would start up at the least sound, thinking that she heard bells. Policemen came and went, sometimes a great clue had been found, then it ended in smoke. The lady's maid was dismissed next day, the nurse

detained in custody, and Norah Desmond, who had been a spoilt child and now a petted wife, with every wish gratified, began to learn her A B C in the school of sorrow.

She would sit and watch at the window until she grew heart-sick, then she would go up to the nursery and cry over some small belonging of her darling. She was thus engaged one day when she heard her husband's step. Had he come with good news?

"Nothing decided, dear, but '13' wants a piece of baby's little frock. A piece of the cashmere I suppose he means."

"I think I have some left."

Colonel Desmond looked very serious and ran downstairs with the bit of stuff quicker than he came up, and even went out of the house with the man to avoid any questions. The truth was, a high reward had been offered for the discovery and safe return of Dorothy, which had occasioned no end of babies being taken to the Station; and now one had been found drowned, answering so to the description that the Colonel had been fetched. To his intense relief the dress was quite a different kind, but still he followed it up. It was not his little girl, and he returned quite happy, that at least he had not to break such terrible tidings to his wife. She thought he had the best of news in store for her when she saw his face, and was cast down indeed to find that he had not. The following day they were standing at the window, when a policeman drove up in a cab, and out came a woman and a baby.

"It must be Dorothy. Oh, George, it must!"

"Hope we are right at last, sir," said the man, looking up as they descended the stairs. "Just your description, deep blue eyes, black lashes, piece of hair cut off at the top, blue dress."

"Yes, it must be," said Norah, springing forward and removing the handkerchief.

Then she started back with a bitter cry at a new, strange face, and fell into her husband's arms.

"Not the little 'un after all," said one of the policemen.

"Very sorry you brought your lady down, sir," said "13," "we thought the servant who opened the door would know, so there would be no need to trouble you—only to disappoint."

"They have all been discharged," said Colonel Desmond, who, with the assistance of "No. 13" was conveying his unconscious wife to the sofa in the library.

It would make a sensational volume to give an account of the long search for the missing baby, but that belongs to a detective story in the annals of Scotland Yard.

Days passed into weeks, and weeks into months, and at last months into years, until Colonel Desmond feared he should lose the fair young mother too. She would insist upon wearing deep mourning through all that time, and if he tried to persuade her to cast it off, she would clasp her hands, saying, "How can I wear colours when perhaps her little life is a torture—illused and starved. If I only knew that my darling were safe in Heaven, then I would leave off mourning."

A little boy brightened the home after two years, but he failed to cheer Norah, or make up for the loss of her first-born; but her husband saw with delight that the arrival of another little daughter brought more frequent smiles to her face, and a brighter colour to the pale cheeks, though she still scanned with eager longing the face of every strange child to find perchance a likeness to the loved and lost.

And so eight long years passed away.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST LIFE SAVED.

"OH, Roland! Did you see that boy like Rex in that train?"

One train had just entered the station; the other was leaving it.

Sir Roland had received a telegram that called him to London. So they had left Croft Hall early to stop at their own station, send up for Rex, and take him with them to purchase his engine.

The special messenger came back with the information that he was nowhere to be found. That they had sounded the gong and the great outside bell in vain.

"I did not see that other boy in the train," said Sir Roland; "but you may depend upon it, what you considered so like Rex, was his very self, going to fly his pigeons from Temply. I shall ask if he is there."

And as the train stopped at the station, Sir Roland called to a lad who was closing the doors.

"Has Master Rex been here to-day?"

"No, sir."

"Someone very like him was in an up train just now."

"He may have gone on, sir, to the next station. He, I know, wanted them to try a longer flight."

"Just like him," laughed Sir Roland. "Always higher and further on."

And the train continued its journey. When they returned by the 6.30, they quite expected to see him waiting for them at one of the near stations, which was his great delight. But he was not even at their own, and they were not a little surprised.

"Where is Master Rex?" enquired they, as they drove up.

"I have not seen him, my Lady. Nurse has been hunting about—she had not seen him to-day."

"Not seen him to-day," repeated Lady Roland. "Not seen him since yesterday?"

"Oh, he was all safe and sound this morning, my Lady, the gardener saw him. He told nurse that very likely he had gone to fly his pigeons, and had missed the train. I daresay we shall have him up before dinner is over."

"I won't have him so late," said Lady Radcliffe, going up straight to the nursery only to hear the same with variations.

"He will be all right, you need not fidget," said her husband. "He has often been as late as this. No, not by train, but about the place—up in a tree. I never feel the least alarmed about him. I believe he can take as good care of himself as most boys of twelve; better, for he would not get into such mischief."

Sir Roland went out after dinner, and sent two men in different directions in vain. Sir Roland sat up in his smoking-room till early morning; and then went up to persuade his wife to go to rest.

"I believe he is kept up in a tree by a bull," said he to comfort her. "I was a whole day once."

Then he went to his dressing-room, and took up his Bible. Of course, we know where it opened. He looked sometime at the great black seals, with the family crest, before he broke them. Once he reached the door, intending to take it to his wife; but on second thoughts he decided to read it himself

first. At one time he looked very serious, at another angry ; but once or twice laughed aloud, which brought his wife into the room, expecting to see her boy. Surely nothing else could have made him laugh like that. He was quite vexed he had done so.

"You must not be alarmed, dear," said he, in as light a tone as possible, "but our son and heir has gone a little trip on his own account, like his 'General,' expecting to return decorated with the Victoria Cross. Here is a letter, and his will !"

"Roland," gasped his wife, looking from the black seals into her husband's face, where she only saw amusement depicted.

"Which shall we read first? They are both equally original."

"Oh! the letter. Where is the boy?"

"June 13th.

"Dearest Father and Mother.

"By the time you receive this I shall have obeyed your last wishes, and followed my 'General.' You said, *Go and do likewise* ; so I've gone. I hope too, to save many lives and do great things, that you will read about at breakfast in the *Times*, until I win the Victoria Cross. But I hope you will all be present when I win that. I thought under the circumstances you would not mind my taking a little of my own money out of my box, it being my own. It is not stealing, is it? You need not worry about me. Abraham was called to leave his home, not knowing whither he went, and you told me to follow his example. I have not taken my Bible, as it is too large for my luggage, especially as I must not stand or sit upon it ; so I have packed my Testament and Psalm book, and my 'General,' that I can sit upon, when I am not reading him. I will never forget to say my prayers ;

I said them by your bed last night as a sort of good-bye. I was sorry you did not come home, to give you a last kiss. I will always go to church on Sunday—when not at sea. I have taken my warm vest and coat.

"With love to all,

"Your very dutiful son,

"REGINALD R. R. RADCLIFFE.

"P.S.—I will not get wet feet; but I am not able to take another pair of boots with me, as nurse always says, 'There's no doing of them up, the ends will stick out somewhere.'

"I leave you my last will and new testament to sign, as you said.

"Your loving,

"REX."

"Fancy the little rascal up to this freak, and signing himself, 'your dutiful son.'"

"Oh! Roland. Where can the boy be?" cried his mother.

"Somewhere about the place, or a station or two down the line, seeing the world. Perhaps a bird's eye view of it from a lofty tree. I daresay Ned knows where he is, and his father says he looks after him like an old hen."

"But we enquired there yesterday, Roland—you forget—and he had not seen Rex."

Her husband had not forgotten, but hoped she had.

"Now you must hear his will, if you are really not sleepy," said he.

"This is the last will and testament of Reginald Robert Rover Radcliffe, being in the full possession of all his five senses, and in vigour of mind and body. Duly witnessed, attested, signed, and sealed.

"I, the above, and beneath, Reginald Robert Rover Radcliffe, being as above said, in possession of all my faculties,

do hereby give and bequeath my landed property to my father: being the house on the bank in the North Field. (The cow did not knock it all down.) Its furniture, divided equally between my brothers and sisters; my large gun to my brother Arthur, on condition that he never shoots at his sisters' dolls, or the cats and kittens. The 'General' says it is wicked to destroy innocent life; but he may kill a rat. Of my personal estate: My pony I hereby give and bequeath to my father (no occasion to name him so often. Everyone knows Sir Reginald is my father, and I have only had that one.) He is to have my pony, to give or to lend to my afore-said brothers and sisters. The same with my books, share and share alike. All my monies, in gold, silver, paper (the paper is in my tin box in the schoolroom), to be given to my sisters; the most to my eldest sister, Katie, because she lost a shilling, through a hole in her pocket, and also because she can buy more eyes for her dolls, that I put out. My pictures to be divided equally, with the exception of the tiger hunt, which can be sold by auction, as they will all want it, and the money given to the poor; or they can draw for it, my father, as *executor*, to be umpire. My clothes to those they fit best. They can grow into them, or grow out of them, whichever mother likes. (I have my great coat and a few other things with me.) The residue of my property—whatever that means—I leave to my father, as also cutting off the *entail*, for I know he will be too good to do it. He would not have my pony's, or dog's tail, cut off for anything. This I again declare to be my last will and testament—signed by me, to-day (18th June.) It is so clear, it can never be contested or put into Chancery—which, I think, means ten chances to one if you get it—I think father explained it to me. (I have the copy with me.) Should I think of any other property, I add a codicil—and here it is. My watch, given me by my god-father, I give and bequeath to my dear mother. I have left it on account of robbers, besides she has it locked up in her

wardrobe. I have taken my little one Katie gave me, but it wants winding three times a day.

"Signed,

"REGINALD ROBERT ROVER RADOLIFFE."

"Oh, Roland, no wonder you laughed," said his wife, as he concluded the document, which he had rendered more amusing by the professional tone he had adopted, and the dryness with which he read the parenthetical remarks.

"Fancy the testator saying he had taken such and certain things away with him," added she, laughing through her tears.

"Oh, where can he be?"

"Safe somewhere, so let us go to sleep, and hope the morning train will bring him home to read his own will, and I hope he will bring back his own things to put into it," said Sir Roland, with another hearty laugh, to keep up his wife.

* * * * *

Some distance down the line, though not an hour from London was a thick wood or plantation, one side skirted the railway, and then wound up to the road leading to the town, though still called "the village."

Under a group of trees stood a young man about twenty-three, finely formed, beautifully cut features, dark hair and eyes, which had a strange expression in them to the close beholder, a yearning look of deep sorrow, the lips compressed as if in pain. He was leaning against a tree as stately as himself, with folded arms, contemplating a gun at his side.

"'To be, or not to be,' that is the question, which you can very soon settle, my friend," said he, giving it a tap. "Nothing to live for, nothing to hope for, nobody to care whether I live or die; one cannot live with a ruined name, far better to die, and—then—ah—and then. Oh, mother! mother! if you had lived, I should not die thus!"

"The spirit shall return to the God who gave it."

The young man started. What voice had uttered these words? Not anyone was in sight. The voice seemed like a little musical bell, as if it had come out of one of the wood flowers. He turned pale, went and looked over the hedge, not any human being near, then he returned to the tree, and stood immovable. Presently he fancied he heard a slight rustle on the other side of a bramble bank. Looking over it, to his surprise he saw, lying full length on the soft grass, a little boy reading, evidently too interested to eat the sandwiches that were beside him.

"Yes, I'll do like my 'General,' I'll win. I'll have a glorious life," and, with a little laugh, he raised a beaming, expressive face, to meet the scrutinizing gaze bent on him, then he sprang up.

"I beg your pardon. Is this your property? Am I trespassing?"

"No, this is not mine, and I doubt if you would be disturbed if you remained here for a month."

"It's a jolly place; it is as good as a desert island," cried the boy. "Do you live on it?"

"No, I did not come in here to *live*," replied the young man half to himself, then added, "Where did you spring from? I never heard, or saw you."

"I have been here a long time," said the boy, "I thought I heard something moving, but fancied you must be a cow."

"A *cow-ard* very likely," replied the youth. "Was that your voice just now saying a verse out of the Bible?"

"I dare say it was, I was learning one, and I often say things out loud."

"Are you at school here?"

"No."

"Do you live here?"

"No."

"Only come in for the day?"

"Looks like it."

"I suppose your people are here?"

"No."

"Quite on your own hook?" asked the youth, surprised at his laconic answers.

"Yes, quite. It's jolly."

"I believe you are playing truant from school."

"That I'm not. I have never been to school, and what's more, I never mean to go, at least not to the school you think about, but where I am ordered to go by my 'General.' The world is a school, and I am in it, and I'm going to save lives, and——"

The young man gave a perceptible start.

"Have you saved any yet?" asked he in a low voice.

"No, not yet, but I mean to have great adventures, and do wonderful things, and at last win the Victoria Cross, like my 'General.'"

"Is that your father?"

"I call him my godfather."

"Is your own father dead?"

"I'm my own father, like the 'General' was his own father. What are you looking like that at me for? It's quite true, the boy is father to the man, isn't he? I have had that drummed into me all my life, so I ought to know it by this time. Why, there's a gun against that tree, is that yours?"

"Don't you touch it, it's loaded," cried the youth, springing between Rex and the gun.

"Do you think I'm frightened at a gun?" asked he scornfully. "I would dance round twenty loaded guns."

"You are not going to dance round that if I know it," said the other decidedly. "Loaded guns are not playthings to amuse life, they are to take it away, to destroy, to kill."

"What are you going to kill?"

"I am not going to kill anything."

"Then why did you load it?"

"I—I had meant to—kill—to fire—but I changed my mind," said the young man.

"What were you going to fire at?"

"The nearest thing to the gun."

"Why, that's the tree, it's leaning against it."

"It was not. There was something nearer," added he, as a cold shiver passed over him.

"I guess it was a bird. Were you going to eat what you killed?"

"Not exactly," said the young man, with a strange, short laugh.

"Then you were doing it only for fun, and the *Times* said the other day that was wanton cruelty, that the birds have as much right to live as we have. The 'General' says a lot about it. I'll read it to you when I find it—are you going away?"

"I'll show you round about the place if you like. There are some queer nooks, and a 'haunted house' some miles away."

"That sounds jolly. Are there noises and lights, and shadows, and strange figures, creeping about in the moonlight?"

"So they say, but I believe it is merely haunted by the three R's."

"What's that?"

"Robbers, ragamuffins, rats."

"Let us go and hide there all night, and see and hear the noises and lights."

"No. I think you would soon wish yourself out again."

"Not if you had your gun."

The two walked together to the town, just as they entered there was a great crowd.

Some accident, I expect," said the young man.

His little companion darted up a flight of steps, and down again.

"It's a bear," he cried, "a dancing bear, what fun, let us get nearer."

Presently there were cries of "shame," "shame," "no," "no," then clapping, between which could be distinguished the frightened cry of a child. The two worked their way into the centre.

"Oh, I say, what a lovely little girl," exclaimed the boy. "What are they doing to her? She is so frightened."

"Oh! not to-day, please, not to-day," cried the child, clasping her hands. "He looks so angry, he snarled. Let me drive myself?"

"Get in, directly," said the man, holding the stick in a menacing manner over her head, and pointing to a small gilt chariot.

"Pretty dear, she looks terrified," said some women in the crowd.

She was just stepping in, when, looking up at the bear, she gave a scream and jumped out. The man set his teeth, and gave her a fierce look, whispering something that made her turn quite white. Then he went to a kind of van, of the gipsy order, to fetch something, leaving another to watch the bear. Directly he turned his back, Rex, to the astonishment of his companion, darted forward into the midst.

"Little girl! What do they want you to do?" asked he.

"To get into that carriage and let the bear push me round. I do not mind when he is in front and I can see him, but I'm so frightened when he's at the back, and I can't, he may put his great arms round and hug me."

"Why can't the bear draw it from the front?" asked some people of the man.

"Because he goes better when he hears the music in front; she has to play the violin."

"Don't be frightened any more, little girl. I will go instead of you," cried Rex, as a sudden thought struck him.

And before the bystanders could recover from their surprise, he had thrust a parcel into the hands of his new acquaintance,

removed the scarlet cloak from the shoulders of the trembling child, taken up her violin, and having dressed himself in the flowing robe and her hat, with its long ostrich plume, he sprang into the chariot, commenced playing his favourite march, and in a few moments was being pushed by the bear round the circle, amidst the cheers and applause of the crowd.

"P. o little 'un. Well done. He's a brave boy, ain't he? Who is he?"

"Wish I was! Rather! I do," said another. "Who is he?"

Some thought he belonged to the owners of the bear—that it was all part of the play; but those who were sheltering the little girl, saw that her terror was too genuine, and shouted and clapped still more the little stranger, who had so magnanimously befriended her. He turned pale when he first looked round and saw how near the bear was to him; but the clapping and praise of the crowd encouraged him, though he knew not that there was a hand on a gun, ready at any moment to be raised in deadly aim at the animal did he venture to place a paw on the young charioteer, whose work was not yet done. The head man, hearing the cheering of the multitude, thought it was the little girl performing her part in answer to his threat; and his amazement knew no bounds, when on coming out of the van, he saw and was told what had taken place.

"Never saw such pluck in a youngster in all my days," added the other keeper. "Even Bruin looked astonished."

"Shan't let her off, for all that," said the other, "or there will be this row to-morrow. "Come here, Dot," called the master. "Now, don't you go and make any more fuss. Bruin is walking round like a lamb, and if he ain't touched that strange boy, it's not likely he will you."

Dot had been hiding between two motherly-looking women.

"Let the little boy go on, if he's willing," said they.

"You attend to your own business and leave me to 'tend to mine," said the man, taking Dot by her arm, who shrank back with an appealing look.

The bear had stopped, and Rex sprang to the side of the little girl.

"Thank you, ever so much," said she. "You were good; but I have to go now."

"But I have done it for you. Won't that do instead of the little girl, please?"

"No, young master. She will have to do it to-morrow, and the next day, and the day after that; so why should she act the baby to-day?"

"Will you go if I do? I will stand between you and the bear," said Rex kindly.

The little girl raised a pair of lovely violet eyes, and with a sweet smile out of rose-bud lips, said,

"I shall not be frightened then."

Unmindful of the crowd, who were watching with eager interest two of the most beautiful children they had ever seen, Rex placed lightly over her the cloak and the hat on her head, and then led her to the carriage with all the grace of a young knight, turned the small seat round, gave her back her violin, and as she began to play he sprang in, and standing all the time, shielded her from the animal, though he was in terrible proximity himself. Of course, the creature was muzzled, but it was not an inviting position, and renewed cheers saluted Rex at this new proof of his courage. Suddenly, the bear let go the strong brass rod by which he was propelling the chariot and raised his forefeet, as if he were about to throw them round the boy. At the same moment the gun was levelled at the animal; but, as the finger was placed on the trigger, he turned and began to waltz round by himself, so what might have caused death, ended in much laughter. It turned out that Dot had been so frightened, that her trembling little fingers brought out more

squeaks from the violin than tunes; so Rex had taken it from her, and standing as he was, played a pretty little lively waltz, which he had often accomplished up in a tree. Certainly his freaks then and on the banisters had been fine training for to-day, without that he could never have balanced himself so steadily. It was not until he was saluted with a thunder of applause, that he discovered it was a real feat by Dot looking up at him with her eyes sparkling.

"That's all for you. I'm so glad."

"It's for the bear," suggested he.

"No it isn't, nasty, ugly thing. It's for you they are clapping. You are as clever as the master."

The performance came to an end, and a man went round with the hat. Never had they taken so much; but as Rex made his way to his companion of the morning, coppers and even silver were thrust into his hand, as well as to the little girl. Rex was about pouring into her pocket the greater part of his money, when she whispered,

"No, thank you, please don't. It will all be taken from me."

"Then I will keep it for you," replied he, dashing through the people into a shop, then out again into another, and came back to her with two bags: one of fruit, another of cakes.

"There, now mind you eat that all yourself, little girl."

"Oh! you are a kind little boy, you have saved me to-day. Please take half of these, I won't touch one if you don't."

Rex took a few to please her; and then he kissed the rosy lips, parted in grateful smiles.

"I shall see you again, shan't I?"

"Yes. I'll come again," said he, running off after the young man.

"When I brought you to see the town, I little expected I was leading you to a show in which you were to be the central figure."

"No, the little girl was that. She is the most lovely I have ever seen; and she said, 'I had saved her,' that was

best of all. I would ride on that bear's back to save her again."

"Before you dashed off, I was just going to ask you your name."

"Call me Robert."

"Robert what?"

"Robert Rover."

"It strikes me the last is a very appropriate name for you. Did you not feel funky when you were standing up in that carriage, within an ace of Bruin's loving arms?"

"He had a great collar round his throat, and the man in the centre of the ring had hold of the thick, long rope, that was passed through it; he said he could tug him back at any moment."

"But the 'hug' might have come before the 'tug.'"

"'Hug' *versus* 'tug,' " laughed the boy.

They had reached the last houses in the town, when a man passed them with a basket of cuttings. He looked surprised, and, after a moment, came back.

"Master Rex. Have you come to fetch your father? They have left Croft Hall."

The boy started.

"What do you mean? Who are you? My name is Robert, and I am not going after any father."

"Now, Master Rex. Trying to take me in. You know quite well that I am head gardener at Croft Hall, and let you try and break your neck climbing the old elm on the south lawn the last time you were staying there. I looked for you yesterday, when the company came down to the hot-houses; but they said you had not come, so I thought, by seeing you now, you had come over with a friend, and I thought I had better tell you that Sir Roland had a telegram, and went off by the early train."

"Well, I suppose I am like this boy you call Rex. My name is Robert. You can ask this gentleman if it is not."

"Yes," said the young man. "I have never known him by any other name. Evidently a case of mistaken identity," added he with a laugh.

And they hurried on.

"Mistaken identity be fiddled. It is just one of Master Rex's larks," said the gardener to himself. "As if my eyes would deceive me, though he is so grown."

"Silly old man. Why does he not mind his own business," said the boy. "I am going back to my desert island for a bit. Will you come, Mr.—?"

"Call me Roy," said the young man. "We will be, 'Rob Roy.'"

Long before they came to the gate there was a small gap, so Rex sprang through it, giving an anxious look down the road as he did so, not unremarked by his companion, then he ran on to the group of trees, and threw himself down where he was first seen, behind the blackberry bushes, raked about the long grass, and found his hidden sandwiches, rather dry by this time; but the fruit and cakes were more inviting, though Roy would not take even one. Then the 'General' came out and was devoured, at the same time Roy watching the boy's countenance. He seemed to forget that anyone was with him, and would laugh and talk with the greatest glee. At last he took off his cap and waved it.

"Well, Robert. That is what the sailors do when they first catch a glimpse of land in the far off horizon. What do you see so enchanting?"

"He did it! He did it, and I did it! Yes, I have done it! and he did it again, and I will do it again!"

"What did he do, Rob?"

"When he was a boy (my 'General' I mean), he saved a little girl from the clutches of a rude boy; and I have saved a little girl from the clutches of a bear. He was always saving children; so I must."

"Perhaps you have saved a man's life," said Roy.

"No, I've never done that, but I mean to."

"And some day you will find you have done it," said Roy, who had thrown himself down near Rex, and he stretched out his arm and patted the boy's wavy hair. "Your 'General' must have been a grand character. Read me some more about him."

"I'll read what the *Times* said about him," said Rex, "and then out of the book."

At last he paused, and saw that his companion had his eyes shut.

"Are you asleep?"

"No," replied Roy, opening them with a sad dreaming look. "I'm too interested for that. I was wondering what sort of a father he had."

"Don't believe he ever had a father; I mean, not that he could remember particularly. He was his own father, and brought himself up."

"I wonder if he had a bad father," mused the other.

"Why? I should much like to know. Can't see that it matters. The 'General' was good all over to make up."

"But Rob, a bad father makes a bad son. If a father falls down the hill——"

"The son can climb up," interrupted Rex, with a laugh.

"Supposing the father will not let him."

"You left him fallen at the bottom of the hill, so he has nothing to do with his son climbing up."

"I think 'running the race' sounds nicer than climbing," replied Roy.

"I think both sound jolly. It's a nice change, but I have some lines here to learn. Perhaps you will understand them.

"The heights by good men reached and kept,
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they while their companions slept,
Were toiling upwards in the night."

"I think it was explained to me that we can't get to the top of a ladder without climbing up, and while the father sleeps the son can climb."

Then Rex went on reading. It was evidently a letter or conversation with some young fellow in whom the "General" was deeply interested.

"'R——, dear lad,' that's you," said the boy, looking up, "perhaps that stands for Roy. 'Roy, dear lad, you grieve me for what you have done, for what you contemplated doing, and at your thoughts for the future. I answer all the questions of your lips, and the deeper ones of your heart, with one emphatic "No." This is my advice to you. Cover your father's memory with a cloud of forgiveness, and never uncover it to brood over past wrongs and their consequences on your life. Before your own master you stand or fall. You are like those of old who declared that as "The fathers had eaten sour grapes, so the children's teeth were set on edge." Remember the answer to that was: "The son *shall not* bear the iniquity of the father." A proud, a scornful, cruel world may visit it on him, but the Supreme Court pronounces a different verdict upon him who doeth that which is lawful and right. Stick fast to your profession, have an aim in life, God bless and keep you, my boy, and bring you into favour and tender love with one who may design to take my place when I am called away.'"

"I suppose you understand more of that than I do," said Rex, looking up to see if Roy were asleep, and saw him sitting up in an attitude of intent listening, with crimson cheeks, parted lips, and eyes glowing with fire.

"I thought you would like that, seeing it is about a father you were talking of," continued the boy, seeing he did not speak. "I don't see how fathers eating sour grapes should set their children's teeth on edge, much more likely the children would eat them—catch me at it though. And if my father were so silly it would not hurt my teeth, how could it?"

And if it did I'd soon eat a bit of toffy and put it all right. But my father would never do anything so stupid," wound up Rex, with a proud toss of his head.

"Are you going home to-night?" presently asked Roy.

"I am at home now," was the reply. "The world is where I live."

"But you are going to your father to-night?"

"How do you know I have any father to go to? I never told you I had, so I cannot go to him. I am going to the hotel."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"By yourself?"

"Yes."

"Then I suppose you are going to have the bill sent in to him?"

"I am not going to have any bill sent in anywhere, that would look like stealing. I am going to pay for it."

"I fancy you will ask for a bed as you would for toffy, and expect to pay about as much."

"No, I shall pay more than a penny."

Another pause.

"Rob, I wish you would let me take you home, by a late train if you prefer it. I should like to tell them what a brave boy you have been."

"No thank you, I am going off to the hotel now."

"Come and have some tea with me first," said Roy, "and then I will show you the 'Haunted House.'"

The words "haunted house" was quite enough for Rex, he was up like a shot.

"Let us go there now."

"No, not until we have had some tea. Whoever heard of visiting a haunted dwelling before sunset?"

"No, we should not hear any queer noises, should we?"

Roy had his way, took his little companion to an out-of-the-

way tea gardens, when he had great trouble to make him eat the tea he had ordered—a far more substantial one than Rex had asked for himself, merely bread and butter and a bun and some milk. Right or wrong he wanted to pay for it.

"You *have* paid for it, Rob, out and out."

"Why, here is my shilling still in my hand," said Rex, trying to transfer it into that of Roy's in vain.

"You have paid for this and a hundred teas. I will explain how, Rob, someday, when you can fully comprehend that there are things paid for in a heavier metal than gold, and other things that the wealth of the world can never repay. Your 'General' will tell you that."

"Oh, will he? I'm very glad, for I can't see what you mean, and what that has to do with my paying for my own tea. I'll look, for I generally understand what *he* says."

A bright young girl had brought them the contested refreshments to a most inviting verandah of sweet peas and honeysuckle.

"Can we go by a short cut to the 'Haunted House?'" asked Roy.

"Yes, sir, across those fields and through the wood yonder. It just lies in the thick of it; but I would advise you not to go near it, certainly not so late as it will be by the time you reach it. I should not like to go in the morning; as to-night, no! not to save my life, scarcely—it's awful."

"Jolly," said Rex, "lots of queer noises."

"Don't take the little boy, sir, he'll get frightened out of his wits."

"The *little* boy does not need to be taken, he will go by himself," said he, with an impatient fall of his shoulder, and determined gleam in his eyes.

"We will take a survey of the surrounding country, at least," said Roy.

Crossing the fields the way indicated, they entered what

appeared a neglected park. The trees and shrubs had been left to themselves for many years, the property in Chancery, the owners abroad. It was thought that one would-be-possessor caused all the stories of ghosts, goblin sights and sounds to be circulated, so that people were afraid of trespassing.

"I catch a glimpse of the house through this opening," said Rex. "Look! Let us scramble through and get to it."

"No, Rob. Let us find our way through the paths. Your way would be dangerous—traps. You must promise not to run on away from me, or I shall turn back at once. I would not lead you into danger for the world, all along this moss is a path—let us follow it."

"I'll run up that tree and tell you how to go, like the guide does in a maze."

"No, not to-day, you might be seen by a poacher and shot at. No doubt there is game about, and——"

As if to bear out the truth of Roy's words there was a loud report, and then a distant cry or scream, whether from a human being or animal it was difficult to decide, the sound was so peculiar. It produced, however, the desired effect. Rex let go the bough by which he intended swinging himself up, and came to the side of his companion, and they pursued their way along the tangled moss-grown alley. They deviated from it for a time to cut across a plantation to what looked like open ground. To Rex's delight their feet sank in the loose, sandy soil, and a rabbit started up from underneath.

"We must get out of this warren," said Roy, "that black iron thing is a trap—see! here are connecting wires."

So they retraced their steps to safer quarters, following the path, first to the right, then to the left.

"No where's an opening," cried Rex, "we must be near the house."

Roy laughed.

"It is a maze, indeed. We have come back to where we

entered. Look ! there are the fields we came down, the little brook we crossed, and just above the tea-gardens. I think it would be wiser to come over in the morning."

Rex so wanted to have another glimpse at the house, that they took a different turning down a path, the entrance of which was hidden from the other side by a large laurel. It appeared less entangled, but treacherous wire, very fine, was crossed at unequal distances. Roy took a letter out of his pocket, and tearing off a small piece at each wire, marked the spot.

"It will be quite dusk when we come back, and that paper will be our guide out."

Rex had dodged behind a high thick bush.

"There's the house," he cried. "What a queer-looking place !"

It was a low built structure, some of the windows were boarded up, the shutters of the lower ones closed.

"What's that ?"

A light glimmered from an upper window that was open, and a sound of knocking was heard.

"It must be inhabited," said Roy, "there is smoke coming out of that chimney."

As they neared the lower windows a sound like the clank of a chain proceeded from the room, followed by a most unearthly noise, that made Rex, who was trying to peer through the chinks, start back.

"That is not a dog."

"Does not sound like it certainly."

They passed under the open windows and heard low moans.

"Perhaps somebody has got shut up there, locked in and can't get out," suggested Rex.

"I do not think so, because of that smoke."

"The door must be on the other side."

Turning the corner where the trees almost touched the house, rendering it nearly dark, they were both startled by

one becoming illuminated by a weird-looking blue light, and glancing towards a turret window whence the rays proceeded, they saw a horrible-looking face clothed in white, with the strange blue flame around.

"That is meant to say 'Not at home to visitors,'" said Roy. "We have received our warning, so will retire. It would be madness to attempt to get in. But I should like to know where the door is."

He ventured to look round the corner, but quickly withdrew, and would not say what he had seen; but the loud report of a gun close to them made Roy grasp Rex's arm and drag him away at a quick pace.

"There were kennels round the corner, and they might send dogs after us, and I have not my gun to return the compliment. Hark!"

A violent barking had succeeded the report.

"I am glad you marked the path with bits of paper," said Rex, much more anxious to get away than he liked to own. "Look! there they are."

"Pick them up," said Roy. "I shall know how to come direct to the house next time, but it will be in the morning."

"Hark! There's a child screaming," said Rex. "Do you think that goblin is killing it—the creature—whatever it is? There it is again. Is it a boy or girl? Ought we not to go and try and save it?"

"No. We should get hurt instead and do no good. I expect they are poachers who have taken up their residence there, and try to frighten anybody who look anxious to pay them a visit, or who they fancy are of enquiring minds."

All the pieces of paper were picked up, but at each turning Roy placed a small stone that would not be remarked by other eyes, then they made for the open and breathed more freely. The moon was up, and Roy noticed that his little companion had a very white face.

"Rob, I think you had better come home with me to-night.

I daresay my landlady can find you a nook somehow, and it would be far better than sleeping at an hotel by yourself."

"No, thank you all the same," replied Rex, quickly remembering his offer to take him back home. "I shall be all right."

"I would go with you to the inn," continued Roy, "but I have some very important business to do. I had forgotten it until I went to tear up that paper. I only hope I shall not be too late. I will take you to the town and see you in safe hands, and will come and fetch you in the morning. Promise me that you will not run off before I arrive?"

"All right," was the reply, and Roy scarcely spoke again until they neared the town.

Rex was for running in to the first hotel.

"That is the most expensive in the place," said Roy, "you had better let that alone."

A waiter, however, came to the door, and Rex asked him if he had any rooms vacant.

"For how large a party?" was the enquiry.

"Only for one."

"Lady or gentleman?"

"Gentleman."

"Where is he?"

"Here," said Rex, pulling himself together to look taller.

"It is for me."

"You?" said the waiter, with a laugh. "Not by yourself, surely?"

"I am quite capable of taking care of myself. If you are full I will go to another hotel," was the off-hand reply.

"We have a room, young gentleman. Three if you could occupy them."

"How much?"

"Three-and-six."

"Three shillings and sixpence for one little bed?" said

Rex in astonishment, "that is dreadfully dear. But I suppose you mean breakfast too, and perhaps dinner."

"Well, we wouldn't mind a bun for breakfast and an egg for dinner," said the man with a laugh.

At this moment a portly-looking dame came forward.

"Why, goodness me, if that is not the brave little boy who tried to protect that poor little girl from the pranks of that bear. Shame to the crowd to stand round and see a little girl frightened out of her wits in that fashion. What do you want, my boy?"

"He asked for a bed, but he evidently thinks breakfast and dinner ought to be thrown in."

"I do not want any meals in bed. I hate it," said Rex. "I only want a little bed, please," added he, turning to the woman, who he thought looked kind, "but I do not want to pay three-and-six for it. I will go somewhere else."

"No you shall not," was her reply. "We can accommodate you cheaper than that. I will see you are all right."

Rex ran back to Roy in haste, fearing he was coming up to arrange for him, as if he were a baby.

But Roy was beginning to see that if he wished to protect him, it must be at a distance. So seeing him enter the house under the care of a motherly-looking woman—manageress no doubt—he went off contented, after a few parting words.

"My dear, I'm Mrs. Styles," said she, when Rex returned, "and you shall have supper with me in my parlour behind the bar. You can go into the public-room and look about till it is ready if you like."

Rex did like, very much. This was not the reception he expected. He had been at hotels with his father and mother, but then they were always ushered up by one or two waiters into the best rooms; certainly never invited to have any meals inside the bar.

He walked into a long room brilliantly lighted, with small tables, at which several gentlemen were seated having

refreshments and reading the newspapers, so Rex thought he would do the same, at least as far as the latter was concerned.

It was the correct thing to do—his father always did—therefore he took up the *Times* and ran his eye over it; but catching sight of *Punch*, he soon made the exchange.

Suddenly he remembered that he had left his great coat and parcel at the station. He had better order a man to go for it. Presently a waiter passed with a tray of tea and coffee.

"Let a man go down to the station for my 'traps,'" said he in a business-like way.

"Are you the little boy for the rocking-horse and ship? It's being brought up," and the waiter passed on without waiting for the indignant denial that was flashing out of Rex's lips and eyes.

Suddenly he caught sight of a gentleman whose face was well known to him, talking with another at a neighbouring table.

How very tiresome! What if he recognized him? He threw down *Punch* and caught up the *Times* again. He could hide behind that, it was so large. No wonder his father preferred it to any other paper.

Rex had only time to retire into private life behind its pages, when the landlady appeared at the door.

"Come to supper, my dear."

Rex never stirred. How did he know that it was for him?

"Dear me, boys and eels are just alike, you never know where they are," and the landlady went out again.

Rex did not venture to peep round his screen until he heard her retreating footsteps. There was a great deal of talking going on, so he hoped no one had heard her words, or thought that they were intended for him.

He expected a waiter would throw open the door and say

"Supper is served, sir." It was not respectful treatment. Perhaps she might take it into her head to come in and say, "Come along, dear, to bed." He would leave this public-room before anything so ignominious occurred.

"One of the bravest acts I have ever heard of. Surely he is older than nine or ten!"

"Not a day. Listen to this, Munro."

Rex caught these words from some gentlemen standing in the window, and then his feat with the bear that day was recounted, and many turned from their newspapers to listen, asked his name, which he was relieved to find not any one knew.

He looked towards the window, wishing he could spring out, but it was too high. He thought it was mean to stop and listen to his own praise, so pretending to be still absorbed in the *Times*, he kept his head inside the uncut sheet and walked quietly out of the room, with his ears burning.

Then he made his way quickly to the station, running as fast as he could, obtained his coat and parcel, for which he had to pay twopence, and was racing back again through the booking-office, when he ran up against a young man, nearly causing him to drop a gun he was changing from one hand to the other to get at his ticket.

It was Roy.

"Goodness me, Rob, what are you doing here? I was hoping you were in bed and asleep."

"That is where I shall be before long. I have come for my 'traps.' I had forgotten them, and the waiter I told to send for them mistook me for some other boy. The 'General' says, 'If you want a thing done do it yourself.' So that's what I'm going to do."

Roy's train swept into the station, and Rex waited to see him off. Suddenly he saw the gentleman whose face he knew hurrying down the platform.

"Why, Rex, it is you after all. Where is your father? He was not in the coffee-room, surely?"

Rex waved his hand, half at the gentleman and half at Roy, and disappeared amongst the passengers for the last train to London.

The gentleman thought he was leading the way to his father, and, losing sight of the boy, looked into several first-class carriages for Sir Roland, but the bell rang and the engine screeched, so he had to take his seat with a "Now then, sir," from a porter.

Another minute all was quiet.

CHAPTER IV.

THE "HAUNTED HOUSE."

ROY looked out of his carriage window expecting to see the little chap at the furthest end of the platform, failing to do so, he drew back into the corner, folded his arms, and closed his eyes until he reached his station, only a quarter-of-an-hour on. He walked rapidly to a pretty detached cottage, tried the door, then rang the bell, which was immediately answered by a bright-faced, kind-looking woman, who looked very pleased as she let her lodger in.

"Oh, Mr. Royston, sir, I am pleased you have come back to-night, you looked so ill when you went away this morning, and talked of perhaps not coming back to-night, that me and my husband have been quite concerned about you. I said, 'fancy if you were taken ill somewhere without me to look after you.' What will you have for supper?"

"Not anything, thank you. I had tea late."

"I have some nice coffee now. Since me and my husband joined the Blue Ribbon we always take coffee or cocoa, and many a pound we have saved. I shall bring some up to you, sir."

"Which, Mrs. Young? The blue ribbon or coffee?"

"Coffee, sir. You seem to practise the 'ribbon' though you do not wear it."

"I hope you have not posted those letters I gave you," said Roy, with a start. "I have hurried back on purpose to prevent it."

"I have not done so, sir. I hope my husband has not; he did take them up, but I said we had better wait until the last train. I heard the gate just now. I'll see."

The landlady hurried away, and Roy sank down in the nearest chair, and covered his face with his hands. "If they have gone! If posted!" He started up. He might yet save them. Calling to Mrs. Young, he ran downstairs; there was not any answer. The door was open and he flew down the short garden, and out at the gate, nearly knocking down Mrs. Young, who was coming round a clump of trees.

"It is all right, sir; I just caught him in time," said she, panting, and handing him two letters.

How little did she dream what was in them. Roy went back to his room, and, when his landlady went up with the coffee, he was sitting near the open window with them still in his hand.

"All in the dark, sir."

"The moon is only hidden by a cloud. I do not want any other light yet. Yes, thank you, I will promise to drink the coffee. Good-night."

Then he relapsed into thought, very painful sometimes from the contraction of his forehead and quivering lips, and presently the rays of a full moon shone on his white face as he slowly opened the letters both addressed to a well-known firm of ship owners. "I little expected to be the one to open these," he murmured, as he read them with a shudder, and then tore them up. Finally, he took up his gun. "You were to have done deadly work to-day," said he, raising the muzzle to his face, and giving the trigger a sharp click with his foot. A shiver went through his frame, then he clasped his hands on the gun, and bent his head in them. "Saved! Saved! by a little child. Where should I have been but for him? In Eternity. Where? — Oh, my mother——"

* * * * *

Rex came out of his hiding-place behind the blinds of the refreshment bar, where he had watched the safe departure of the gentleman, and made up his mind that he would, in future, keep clear of railway stations. He hurried back to the hotel, and went into the bar. In the sitting-room at the back there were the remains of supper and a plate put aside well supplied. Rex guessed it was intended for him, but as Mrs. Styles was not there, he did not like to touch it, so sat on the small sofa looking at quaint old pictures, and wondering what they were doing at home. It was too early for his father to have found his letter. When the landlady came in, she found him fast asleep with his parcel and coat under his head. He looked very astonished at finding himself in a strange place when she awoke him for his supper.

"I looked for you, my dear, when it was first ready; I thought while we were eating it, you should tell me all about your adventures with the bear, and how you came to be all alone in this place; but now, you must have it by yourself. I have a lot of company just come in, that boy you see in the bar will take you up to your room when you have finished."

Rex was very glad to have his supper alone with the "General," he would not ask uncomfortable questions as the landlady would have done. He felt too sleepy to eat at first, but the tea refreshed him, and in a little time he began to get quite hungry, and not at all inclined to go to bed.

"Are you ready?" asked the boy, as he came in with some bottles, "for I am going upstairs, and can show you where you are to sleep."

Rex jumped up and followed him until he came to a small room lighted with gas.

"This is it. Mind you go on sleeping till the sun shines in your eyes, then you'll have a jolly good night."

"Shall I put out the gas when I get into bed?" asked Rex.

"I expect you had better keep it going, or you may get frightened."

"Frightened," cried Rex indignantly. "What is there to be frightened at?"

"Most folks are in this room," said the boy, grinning; "but as you are not afraid of dancing with a bear, you won't mind a haunted room. Perhaps you've a fancy for ghosts, so mind you keep the gas alight to look at 'em." And the boy shut the door with a bang, and ran down the stairs laughing.

Rex felt very strange. It was a different matter saving the little girl in her fright, and taking her place of danger, as he knew the "General" would have done, and then his courage had been kept up by the applause of the crowd; but now, what unknown danger was he to face quite alone and unprotected? Not any Roy near with his gun. What did that boy mean? He was half inclined to go down and ask him, but he did not like his laugh, and he might call him a baby or a coward, and he would rather face two ghosts than anything so dreadful. But he started round, for at that moment such a queer noise came from under the bed—three distinct taps, and then a prolonged sound such as he made with his saw in the shed. He fancied the valance of the bed moved, how he wished it had not been there, then he could have seen right under it. He went to raise it, but what if there were someone there? He heard voices in the rooms adjoining, so he opened the door that he could run out, and then he looked under the bed, not giving himself time to think. For one second he was startled, but not longer. There was not anything more alarming than a box. As he was close to the wide open door, he raised its lid, only some brown paper. So he shut the door and laughed, then he locked it, having heard his father say, "Whatever they did at home, it was always safer to lock your door at an hotel." The best thing was to get into bed; so he undid his parcel, took out his Bible, and read the portion for that evening. And he thought of another Bible that was perhaps being opened just then, and how his father would look surprised, and read his

letter first, and—"Oh! what is that?" Rex jumped up. The chair upon which he was sitting was shaking; one of the legs seemed violently pulled. He ran to the door, and could not at first open it. When he did nobody was in sight. He felt inclined to leave it open for company's sake, but that would never do. However, with it closed, he could hear the sound of distant voices and laughter. Perhaps, after all, it was only the occupants of the adjoining room who moved something heavy and shook his chair. His father would laugh at him for being frightened. He had often told him there were not such things as ghosts and goblins, and he had been very angry with one of the stable boys for talking of such rubbish in the presence of the children. So he shut the door like a man, and bolted it. Then he went to the window to discover if he could make his escape from it in case of need. He drew aside the curtains, then the blind, but all was pitch dark, and he could not open the window try as he did with all his strength. What could have become of the moon that was shining so brightly when he came to bed?

"Ha! Ha! I thought you would be too frightened to sleep without the gas?" came a voice through the key-hole.

"I am not in bed yet," returned Rex in an angry tone. "Are you going round all the rooms to see if the visitors have put out their gas? I am not accustomed to that sort of thing at hotels. You had better go and mind your own business at the bar, or I shall ring the bell."

A burst of derisive laughter, and a hurried flight down the stairs, was the only answer to Rex's lofty speech, who was determined, come what may, to put out the gas. It was no use stopping up the key-hole, for the light could be seen above and below, and through the cracks.

He was glad to see the bell close to his head, though what a queer thing it was, to be sure, like a crimson rope.

Then he said his prayers, and turned out the gas very slowly, with a great longing to keep it in. He wished very

much that it had been situated close to the bell, and then he would have been safe in bed, and only had to raise his arm to put it out, instead of having to walk across the room in the pitch dark. What a flying leap he made of it, and then shut his eyes, hoping he should go to sleep in a minute, as he generally did at home. Was it possible that only last night he slept in his own little bed in his pretty bright room? it seemed ever so many days, so much had happened since he left it, for which reason sleep was far from the excitable little brain. He was determined he would not think of ghosts and goblins, so he turned his thoughts to what was quite contrary and lovely. Poor little Dot, how he meant to go the first thing in the morning to the same place and give her the money she had asked him to keep for her.

Bump, thump, bump, under the bed. Rex's heart jumped into his mouth, then down again, and stood still.

Bumperty, thumperty, tap, tap. Rex hid his head under the clothes. Why had he put out the gas? He could not light it again. Yes, there were matches, but they were on the other side of the room, and he dare not get out of bed. All was silent. "The beating of his heart was the only sound he heard." Presently he looked up and tried to fathom the impenetrable darkness.

A long stillness. Perhaps, after all, it was somebody packing up in the next room, and he tried to think of Dot; but somehow only the horrible face he had seen at the "Haunted House" came before him.

A strange rustling sound under the bed. It must be a conjuror's box. Was anything going to jump out. A strange noise across the room, as if the chair were having a walk, then all was still for some short time, until a noise in the chimney attracted his attention, rustling and scratching. Was anybody coming down the chimney, as they could not come in at the door?

All quiet again, and he was at last going off to sleep, when

he started up with a scream, which he hoped nobody had heard, most of all the bar boy, but something had gone over his face. It was very light and cold, and at the same time there was a movement under his pillow. It seemed as if it were going from under his head. Surely the room must be filled with strange creatures, he could stand it no longer, and he seized the bell; but a scratching rush down the wall was the answer, and the long dirty crimson rope fell upon him. That was a climax. It was the last feather, and though it did not break his back, it gave the finishing touch to his little tried nerves, and he burst into a flood of tears, which fortunately ended in sleep, not a very comfortable one, for his father was riding on the bear, which was trying to catch Dot. And the horrible face at the "Haunted House" had turned into his mother.

Suddenly a loud knocking at the door, decidedly human. It was, no doubt, that tiresome bar-boy.

"Go to bed," cried Rex. "You are a very naughty boy. I believe it was you in the chimney just now. Go you to bed and let me get some sleep, I am very tired."

"It is I, Rob."

"Who is I?"

"Roy. Let me in."

"No, it cannot be Roy he is ever so far away, and he would not be coming over here in the middle of the night. You are pretending. Go away to bed."

"Open the door, Rob, it is nearly eleven o'clock."

"That is a story, for I have been in bed a great many hours, and I am sure I heard the church clock strike two."

"No doubt you did. I mean eleven o'clock in the morning. Open the door, it is indeed Roy."

Rex was now thoroughly awake, and fully recognized the voice. How could it be morning yet, pitch dark? He felt his way to the door, but he was a long time about it.

"What do you mean by cannot find the door?" asked Roy, as he was unbolting it, and great was his surprise at being admitted into a totally dark room.

"Why, the shutters must be closed," said Roy, going to the window and drawing aside the curtains.

And, feeling about, Rex caught up the matches and lighted the gas, when a great exclamation escaped Roy.

"No wonder you are in such a fog, old man! Why, there is not any window at all! It is all a great sham, a mere make-believe."

"No wonder I thought it was the middle of the night," laughed Rex, amused at the idea, and pleased at having Roy once more instead of the bar-boy. "Perhaps that was why he told me to keep the gas on," said Rex, "that people were frightened at this room, as it is haunted, and so it is. I——"

"You have been dreaming of the 'Haunted House,'" laughed his companion.

"Perhaps I have, but this is a room out of it. I only wish you had been here, I have had an awful night of it, I can tell you. Noises and bumpings under the bed and all over the room. That chair walked across, I left it under the gas, and——"

Roy was sitting upon it, and sprang up pretending to be very alarmed.

"Yes, you may laugh, but I heard it. It was the same thumping that was going on under the bed. Somebody was moving my pillow and bolster, and walked, all cold, over my face."

"*Somebody*. What a clever goblin; and your face not to look any the worse," said Roy, laughing again, yet eyeing narrowly the little boy whose bright colour had gone, and the eyes with dark rims under them. "And did *somebody* turn into that great red snake on your bed."

"No, that is the bell, all a sham like the window," said Rex, turning towards it in some confusion, not wishing Roy to think he had rung it in his fright.

But Roy did guess, and there was a look of anger on his face, as he said,

"You go on dressing, Rob, my boy. Yes, that's right, dash your face well into that cold water, and I will find out the ghosts, and punish the goblins and burglars. Look! here is the first, I will cut him in two."

He held up the chair, to which fine cord was attached, and which ran along under the carpet and door. There were two more hidden by the stair druggets.

"I have found the other ghosts," said Roy, plunging his long arm under the bed and dragging out the box, to which a string was tied, and when pulled, caused the same bumping noise Rex had heard in the night.

Roy opened it and turned out the brown paper, when two burglars sprang out of it, in the shape of two large mice, who had, no doubt, been imprisoned asleep, after regaling on remnants of cheese, cake, and bread. Rex was so delighted at the horrors of the night being so satisfactorily cleared up, that instead of drying himself, he stood all wet, waving his towels in the air, and found the nest of his visitors under his bolster; whilst Roy held up the pillow with another cord at the end.

The boy at the bar was busy washing tumblers, when a strong hand seized him.

"You coward. You big bully, to try and frighten a little boy throughout the whole night, who has more courage and bravery in his little finger than you have in your whole body. You deserve a good horse-whipping, and you will get it finely when that young gentleman's father comes over here. You are too great a coward to practise your tricks on an older boy. You cur, who can only bark behind a fence."

And Roy, shaking him like a rat, left him on the floor with his teeth chattering, and howling like a stray dog, while he went in search of the landlady, and told her how her little guest had been served, at which her anger knew no bounds.

"Bless his little heart; to think, after his brave act, he should be treated like that. My manager is ill, and I was

that worried yesterday, I didn't know which way to turn. Something always happens in race week or election time, and makes us short of hands; and then the last train is sure to bring a run on the house, and make us short of rooms. I particularly told Ned to put a gentleman's valet in 'the room of horrors,' as they call it, because of there being no window, and being over-run with mice and black beetles—we can't get rid of them without pulling down the chimney—but we put those in who sleep heavily, and the gas being on all night, and the demon beetle trap under the bed, they are none the wiser. Ned shall have it in a way he won't like when the manager comes back. He needs a hard grip on him."

"He has had a strong hand on him just now," said Roy. He will not forget me in a hurry."

"Glad you did, sir. Playing his practical jokes on a little boy, and a stranger too. There's a nice breakfast for him when he comes down."

Which Rex heartily enjoyed; but he kept a sharp lookout on the door, not wishing to catch sight of any face who would recognize him.

"What are you going to do, Rob?" said Roy presently, looking up from the paper. "Have you had enough fun? Are you going home, to-day?"

"No. I am not ordered home yet."

"Why? Have you received any letters this morning?"

"Not any, and don't want. I shall go on as I'm sent. I have important work to do, and I am going to set about it as fast as I can."

"What is that?"

"To return stolen goods. I have Dot's money, and I am going to the other side of the town to give it her."

"But not to act instead of her, you must not do that again to-day. Go and give her the money and then return here. I have my tricycle, and we will go a grand tour, and then you shall stay with me for the night."

"Thank you. It is very kind of you, but I expect I shall have to go in a contrary direction."

"Wait till you know in which quarter I live," laughed Roy, with a secret suspicion that wherever he named would be as opposite as the poles, as regarded the boy's route. "What is your next destination?"

"I do not know yet. I am acting under sealed orders, like my 'General.' Waiter, will you let me have my bill, please?"

Roy smiled, and yet he could not turn into ridicule the child, who, without any assumption or priggishness, was so continually the little man of business, with a high aim and purpose in life.

"I am living at Briarwood, Rob."

"That is not on the main line, is it?"

"No, a branch."

"I would like to see it. When do you go?"

"Not yet; I have some writing to do. Go and pay the little girl."

"Not any bill, sir," said the waiter, as he returned with a breakfast tray.

Rex said there must be some mistake, he had never heard that before. Generally they handed his father bills for which he had never asked or desired, and at which he generally looked surprised.

So Rex went in search of the landlady, followed by Roy.

There was not any mistake. She positively refused to take a penny, saying,

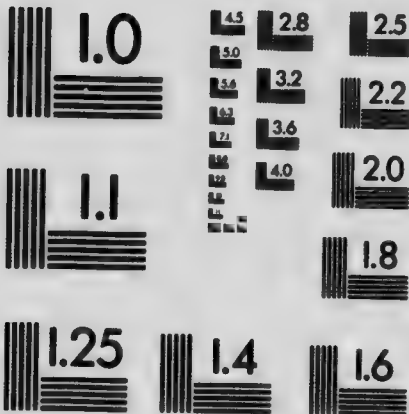
"That even was poor compensation for the treatment he had received at the hands of the bar-boy. If he liked to come there again, he should be placed in a proper room, and might then pay for it."

So Rex went after Dot, thinking to find her in the same place as yesterday, but they were not there, they had gone to



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a village on the other side of the town. It would take an hour to walk ; but there was a short cut across the fields bordering the woods near the "Haunted House." Rex was delighted. He could kill two birds with one stone : Find Dot, and have a peep at the "Haunted House," and find out, perhaps, who was living there. He had thought of returning for Roy, but very likely he would have refused making a second visit to a place that looked so horrible last night, and Rex would never venture there again after sunset. Now it was shining brilliantly, so he could see the traps. He did not wish to enquire the way, so he walked nearly to the tea gardens, and then ran-down the hill and over the bridge ; it did not seem nearly so far to-day. He remembered the trees by the hidden path, which he entered, and quickly spied out the white stones Roy had placed there. He saw through the trees that the windows were open ; but he could not see any smoke. As he drew nearer, he heard angry words in a woman's voice, answered by the passionate replies of a man, as he threw something out of the window. Then he heard a little child cry, and a small face appear at a window. So Rex hurried to the spot, and would certainly have been caught in a trap, if it had not been for the white stones.

Great was his amazement to recognize Dot. But as he called to her, waving his hat, she held up her finger to her lips, and then pointed round the corner. Rex hesitated. That was where all the "ghosts" were. The horrible sights that even Roy would not face.

Presently, a small red handkerchief was waved out of the window where the awful creature was. How could he go near that. Perhaps it was a trap to catch him. Should he go back and tell Roy ? While he was hesitating, he walked a few steps nearer, and there, in the place of the goblin, was the sweet face of Dot.

"Don't let them see you. I should like to speak to you, but I dare not come down."

"Is that tree safe?" asked Rex, pointing to one that was close to the window. "It was all in blue flames last night. Is it a great trap?"

"No, it is quite safe; it is a beautiful tree. It was only the blue light from this room—— Oh! take care; do not fall!"

Rex was half up the tree by this time, and never stopped till he reached the branches that touched the window, they were so thick that he was quite hidden from view. His delight was extreme—increased at the joy manifested by the little girl at seeing him again. Her eyes sparkling like diamonds through her tears.

"You must speak very softly, and the minute I give you a sign be quite still till I speak again."

"Why are you in this wicked 'haunted house?'" enquired Rex.

"It is wicked, but it is not haunted as people think. Promise you will not tell folks what I say. They, at least he, would kill me if he knew I had let cats out of the bag."

"Who is *he*?"

"The Boss."

"Who is 'Boss'? The bear?" asked Rex.

"No, the master of the bear, him you saw yesterday, who would have beaten me had you not so kindly taken my place."

"Why are you here? Who lets you this house?"

"Nobody lets—we came and took possession. The police will turn us out soon I dare say, but they haven't been after us yet, and Mr. Jumper, the Boss, you know, frightens people out of their lives at night——"

"Yes, he does," interrupted Rex. "I was here last night, and the place looked dreadful. There are not such things as ghosts and goblins, but he had awful things about."

"Was that you, I wonder, just at dusk, when the dogs barked, and they fired out of the window?"

"Yes; I was here with a gentleman. Who was that dreadful-looking being at this very window?"

"I wish I had known it was you. I would have let you see me somehow, and then you would not have been afraid. That was only one of them with a hideous mask on, and he made the blue lights like they do on the stage; and he walks about the grounds at night, and there is a pit he jumps into when people are about, and they think it is a ghost, and are too terrified ever to come again. I could tell you lots of things they do, but——"

Dot suddenly held up her finger, and was lost to sight, so was Rex in the thick branches. Presently she appeared again "quite safe."

"Mother came in, and then a man, so I pretended to be playing with my doll; they only came to fetch something."

"There was a dreadful noise down there last night," said Rex, "and a chain clanking. What was it?"

"The bear; that is where he sleeps sometimes, when too many folks are about, or the police. If they found him in the stables, where he ought to be, they would know we were here."

"I have brought you your money, Dot. I wonder if I can get to the end of this thick branch, and if you can reach far enough out to take it?"

"No, no," cried Dot. "Do not try, the branch might break; tie it up in your handkerchief and throw it in. Only half though, the rest is yours; the whole of it really belongs to you. Please do not give me all."

"Yes, I shall," said Rex.

"If you do, I shall tie some up in the return corner of your handkerchief, and I shall miss my arm, and drop—and then we shall be found out. Please do as I ask you, and what am I to call you?"

"Rob," said he, proceeding to tie up the greater part of the money. "There, I have done what you asked me," and he threw the money-ball in.

"What a lot," cried Dot. "We never had so much before. Jumper said it was all owing to you, and he wished you belonged to the troupe. Now, catch again."

Rex thought it was only the handkerchief, but as he caught it, he felt it hard, and guessed that Dot had returned some of the money; so he flung it back again, but he was startled by a cry in a man's voice, and Dot said in a frightened whisper,

"Hide, and go, or you will be killed," and she flew from the window. Rex wondered what was the matter. Should he wait and see? Perhaps he had better obey the little girl, or he might get her into trouble. As he slid down the tree, he heard the words, "Come to-morrow." He looked up and down, but Dot was nowhere to be seen, and hearing a door open round the corner, he ran with all his might, and gained the maze. How glad Roy would have been could he have seen how his white stones were aiding his little friend in his escape, but Rex was very silent when he returned; and, Roy, busy writing, did not question him.

CHAPTER V.

TRANSFORMATION.

HALF-AN-HOUR past.

"Rob," said he suddenly, "I have left a particular letter at my lodgings, would you like to go by train and fetch it? My landlady will give it to you if I write a line; or shall I go? in which case I shall finish my business there, and will come over for you on my tricycle about five, for I am not going to let you off coming to me. That is my address," added Roy, tossing over an empty envelope.

Rex began to consider which he had better do. The tricycle sounded most enjoyable, but there was danger travelling like that with Roy. He could not suddenly ask him, on the approach of anyone, or somebody in particular, to hide in a field, or up a tree; and then there was danger still greater at the railway stations, from his experience of the night before. Suddenly two gentlemen passed the window. Rex started from his chair crimson, with a frightened look.

"You go on, Roy, by yourself, I will follow by-and-bye, I promise," and he rushed from the room before Roy had recovered from his astonishment.

In a few moments the gentlemen who had passed the window entered the coffee-room and gave a look round.

"Are you sure your gardener saw him?"

"Yes, he declared it was Rex, he saw him walking with a young man just out of the town."

Roy pricked up his ears, very glad it was not the gardener himself, who might have remembered him.

"I firmly believe it is your boy, Sir Roland, who was the hero of the bear performance that is the talk of the town."

Roy looked up again from his letters. Was that tall aristocratic man Rob's father? He could imagine the little fellow developing into the same style of figure, and the sparkling eyes into those expressive of all that was noble.

However, he was not sure of the relationship yet, and he had no wish to betray the boy, so long as he could keep him from harm. His holiday would soon end, and when he could protect him no longer he would hand him over. So he put up his writings and left the coffee-room, wondering where Rex was hiding, or if he had gone off to the station. He gave a look up into the dark room, but the boy's belongings had gone. Evidently he had left, so he was not going to call after him, as the gentlemen might hear. He hurried to the station hoping he might find Rob there, and they would go together to Briarwood. He little thought, as he came out of the dark room, that the faintest sound would have been heard by Rob, only hidden from him by a thin partition.

He had seized on his things, and rushed into the adjoining room which he knew was vacant. There was a cupboard papered over, which concealed it from the eye of strangers. Rob tried the door, it was locked; but going round the room in his fright, he trod upon something hard, and saw the tip of a key at the edge of the carpet. He picked it up and put it into the keyhole. To his joy it fitted. What if it should be full of things? Yes, it was crowded with books, but as there were not any shelves, by standing on some large ones there was plenty of room for him to hide; but it would not quite close, so he took out the key and put it inside. To his great delight it locked quite well, and he had only just done so, and felt himself safe, when voices ascended the stairs, and he heard the landlady say,

"He slept up here, sir ; but I find he left after breakfast, and took away all his things."

Rex was glad he had them safe in the cupboard.

"If you could have seen them you would have been able to identify him."

Rex had his "General" tucked under his arm, and gave it a great hug.

"You need not be at all anxious about him, sir, he will be all right. They said he looked a splendid boy standing up in that gilt car, drawn by the bear, treating the little girl like a queen. Your good lady need not worry about him, his elder brother will be sure to look after him."

"Elder brother!" repeated another voice, Rex recognized as Sir Roland's. "He has not any."

"Maybe it is his cousin, sir."

"No. I fear we are on the wrong track after all."

"It will make his mother quite ill if I go home without him."

Rex's eyes filled, and he put his hand on the lock.

"He shall have a good thrashing when he comes home."

Rex's eyes were dry in a moment, and if he could have done it, he would have doubly locked the door.

"If he were my boy," said the other gentleman, "I would give him a good licking and lock him up."

Rex felt inclined to say he had locked himself up instead, and was very glad he was not his father.

"Let us go to the other hotel and enquire," suggested Sir Roland. "If they send him up a heavy bill he will soon get tired of hotels. I believe the little rascal is all right somewhere, he is sure to be known about here, and will be brought home. If not, wait until his money is exhausted, and he will find his way home quick enough," added his father laughing.

An indignant stamp on the books inside the cupboard. "Brought back indeed, as if he were a lost parcel—never!"

"I dare say he is quite safe with the gentleman, sir. I

cannot tell you his name ; but, by the way, he was looking after him, I quite think he must be a relation. I find the little boy has not entered his name on the visitor's list. They must have left more than three hours ago.

Rex longed to have a peep at his father through the keyhole ; but he dare not remove the key, it would have grated in the lock.

Another minute, and he had quitted the room, and the occupant of the cupboard crept out, relocked it, and placed the key where he had found it. Then he listened and looked over the landing—all seemed quiet. He darted to the next flight, and saw a room empty, which had some steps leading to the garden. Fortune was favouring him indeed, for there was a gate open, by which he could reach a side street. It was generally locked, but Ned, the bar-boy, had forgotten to do so. Thus, without meaning it, he had been the means of Rex escaping quite comfortably without running the risk of descending to the entrance hall, or going round by the bar. If Ned had only known, what a nice trap he would have laid for him ; instead, Rex had to cross a short alley this way so he thought he would put on his great coat and turn up the collar, by way of altering his appearance, and then looking out and left, ran with all his might to the station. He saw the train just starting, but had forgotten to take his ticket, and returned with a frightened look at the guard, when, to his joy, a white handkerchief waved from a window, and he recognised Roy, who, telling the guard he would pay at the other end, opened the door of the carriage, and he sprang in, too breathless with excitement and pleasure to answer Roy's questions.

"Are you packed up for the North Pole?" asked he, touching the boy's coat.

Rex flushed and took it off.

"Do you know, Rob? I think it was your father who came into the coffee-room just after you left."

"How do you know I have a father? And what made you think he was mine?"

"Because he was looking after a little boy who had signalized himself with a bear," said Roy drily, "and, for fear I should be asked any questions, I came away."

Roy was rewarded with a flash of gratitude that the lips were afraid to utter.

"Is your father Sir Roland?"

"Is that my name?" asked Rex. "Am I Roland?"

"Look! Roy, at that jolly tall tree. Would you not like to be at the top of it?"

And Rex put his head out of the window partly to avoid further questions, and because the tree had put him in mind of Dot. Roy sat in his corner and watched him. On went the train carrying the two every moment farther away from that incident in their life's journey, and yet it was never to be forgotten. The day was not far distant when Roy heartily wished he had acted differently in the coffee-room, and had gone up to the gentleman, telling him all he knew. If he had only asked his name. And the time came when Rex looked back with a yearning longing to that dark cupboard, and the sound of his father's voice, with a craving wish that he could just unlock the door and be in those loving protecting arms.

"Look! Rob," cried Roy suddenly. "Do you see those white chimneys through the trees?"

"Yes, there's a turret now. What of it?"

"It is the 'Haunted House,'" replied Roy.

"Now there is an opening, you can see its front. It is better to look at from a distance you will think."

"Why, I thought it was miles away," cried Rex, looking intently at it, wondering if Dot were at one of the windows, what the man called out for, and why she looked so frightened.

He longed to tell Roy all about it. How astonished he would be did he know of his visit; but he was under a promise to Dot, and a promise was a very binding thing in his eyes. It had been drilled into him from his

babyhood, the "O, you promised!" of the nursery, and its deeper significance downstairs under his mother's teaching, rendered it sacred. And was not the "General" a man of his word? Besides, he might get Dot into dreadful punishment if it were found out where they lived. He must keep her secret, come what may.

"Did you give the money to the little girl?" asked Roy suddenly.

"Yes," said Rex with a start.

"Was she acting with the bear?"

"No, I did not see the bear. I——"

"Briarwood! Briarwood!" called the guard.

"Come along, Rob," said Roy, and the two sprang out and were soon going across a lovely field, after Rex had insisted upon paying his own fare.

"I have brought you an occupant for that small bed in my room, Mrs. Young," said Roy to his landlady. "It will not put you out for a day or two, will it?"

"Not for a week or two if you like, sir."

He thought it better to say so short a time before Rex, to make him think of going home after that.

"Here's a book of adventures for the young gentleman," said , when she brought up tea, "and here is the local paper, sir, with a very real exploit of a little boy only yesterday—'An Adventure with a Bear'—a little chap about your age. So I thought you would like to read about it. I shall not want it till my husband comes home."

Rex coloured as he thanked her, but did not say a word about his being the hero of the story, and Roy thought, after the events of the morning, that it was safer not to enlighten her on the subject.

"We shall go on a grand tour round this small world of Briarwood," said Roy. "My tricycle will wonder what has become of me."

And after tea they started.

How "Rob Roy" enjoyed it through the rich golden sunset, which cast its glowing beam on the old white stones, grey now with age, the "Haunted House" visible here and there where there were gaps in the thick foliage; and then they hid their vehicle under some brushwood, and went through the wood until they arrived at a rough little gate, which opened on to some corn-fields, then a long hop-garden, beyond which were the wild grounds of the "Haunted House."

Roy wondered his little companion did not propose making another visit there, but concluded that his first had been more than enough for him, and so they returned in the gloaming, the nightingale sending forth its sweet chorale, which always made Roy think of his mother; and then he listened to Rex's quaint way of telling stories about his "General" and his own nine years' experience of life. Dreamy golden light floated over the trees, glinted in warm tints on the bark of the tall firs, and then they came to the spot where they had hidden the tricycle, raised the brushwood, but it was not there. Of course, they had mistaken the place, there was another heap beyond; but when they reached it there was not anything underneath. Where could it be? They must have mistaken the path. So they retraced their steps in vain, nothing could be seen of it.

"The place must be haunted," said Rex. "Who do you think watched us hide it?"

"The imps of the wood—the dancing elves," said Roy. "If we were to stay here till moonlight, we should see six of them spinning away towards the 'Haunted House.'"

An idea struck Rex. His father often said, "Many a truth is spoken in jest." What if it had been spirited away by the inhabitants of the "Haunted House?" Dot said they were wicked, so they would think nothing of stealing. Someone must have seen them enter the wood and followed, knowing that they could not proceed far on their conveyance.

"We must come in the morning," said Roy. "It is not

any use searching in the dark, and we shall have to climb a fence or two, the roadway will be too long for you."

"I'm not tired," cried Rex. "Let us go the high road. We may meet the thief."

"Do you expect to meet a party of imps, or one ogre, careering along the public road, exhibiting my red light and ringing the bell?" laughed Roy. "No, J. Rob, old chap, if you are not tired, you ought to be."

So Rex had plenty of climbing and scrambling, and the moon was full up ere they reached home.

"It's them poachers," exclaimed Mrs. Young, when Roy informed her of his loss. "Glad you did not remain later to watch. They are tough customers to deal with I can tell you. You see, there are rabbits in that wood, come up from the warren at the 'Haunted House,' and no doubt you were watched by the poachers concealing the tricycle."

There was no help for it. Roy went out in search of a policeman, giving him a description of it; but the man gave him little hopes of its recovery.

"Do you think he will get it for you?" asked Rex, when he returned.

"Ten chances to one," replied Roy, "and that one is, there are red cross-bars on the wheels. I did it myself, and under the maker's name—which is 'Dumpey'—I scratched 'Roy.'"

"'Red cross-bars,' 'Dumpey,' and 'Roy,' that will be enough to find it," said Rex reflectively, as he went off to bed.

When Roy went up sometime after, expecting to find him asleep, he found him reading in his New Testament, never speaking when he entered the room, and then he knelt down to his prayers. Roy walked softly to the open window and watched the moonbeams resting on the curly head, and then they passed on to a high shelf, where lay a Bible, that had the appearance of not having been disturbed for months. The dust was so thick upon it that John Knox's word could have

been legible in it. The rays of the moon flitted to and fro as if they longed to sweep it away, and then reluctantly left the shelf, and rested lovingly on the pure, little upturned face kneeling at the small bed. A crowd of thoughts rushed into the young man's mind, while his eyes were riveted on the book. The spirit of the past seemed to be placing vivid pictures before him, and he saw himself like Rex, and felt the touch of a vanished hand, and heard a voice that had long been still.

Rex had been fast asleep for nearly an hour ere Roy thought of following his example.

He awoke to a sweet sound of church bells—distant chimes wafted by the morning breeze through the open window. He had dreamt a strange dream, such as he never had before, and ere he was fully awake, he longed to go to sleep again. We have all done that in our lives—longed to finish the yet unfinished story. Those bells seemed to be links between. Now the tune of an old remembered hymn. Oh, if he could only continue his dream. But though he kept his eyes closed, full sense was returning, he was becoming wide awake, and his dream dissolved into the past. The church bells had changed into the whir-whirring sweep of his tricycle, and now he was fully awake to the fact of its loss. He and Rob would go and have a hunt for it after breakfast. The poachers might venture out with it during church time. The boy would enjoy the hunt.

“‘If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my Holy Day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure.’”

What was that sounding like the voice out of the flowers that terrible morning, or that would have been so terrible had he not been arrested by it?

A little musical laugh followed.

“I know it at last. I said I would.”

"Why, Rob!" cried Roy, starting up, I thought you were asleep still. What is that you are reading?"

"My Sunday verse. I have been no end of Sundays learning it bit by bit, and now I am going on to the next verse, the last in the chapter. I find the 'General' knew both before he was my age."

"Knew what, old boy?"

"Why, those verses about the Sabbath in *Isaiah* lviii. 13, 14. I have not all my Bible here, but I know that is right, isn't it?"

"I do not know."

"Well, the 'General' did; so I have been saying them to him to-day, and this is what he says: 'A child can never be too young to learn these verses; let him grow into them.' That is what I am doing, just like my little brother will grow into my clothes. 'It is one of the great pivots for a man to stand upon through life.'"

Roy glanced up at the shelf. A strange, uneasy look rested on the dust-covered Bible. He hoped the little chap would not ask for one, and it was a relief that something attracted him to the gardens, where he remained until called to breakfast.

"I wonder if the goblins and the poachers have been having a fight over your tricycle, Roy?"

"We will go and have a good hunt for them presently. I believe you would like to chase a goblin up a tree, Rob. We will start soon after breakfast."

"Why, Roy, we shall not have time. You forget it is Sunday, the bells will soon be ringing for church."

"The poachers will not be there," laughed Roy.

"No, but we shall."

"Do you always go to church, Rob?"

"Yes, never miss."

"It is too grown-up for you. Beyond your comprehension."

"I can understand no end of it. I have been accustomed to go to church ever since the first Sunday after I was three years old. Never remained at home except when I had the measles."

It ended by Rex marching off to church by himself, according to his promise in his letter; and Roy went off in search of his tricycle. But it was not that which occupied his mind. A crowd of other things were running in his head. His dream, the church bells, Rex's voice, and the words that had awakened him. He was "turning his foot away" now that was evident, and yet what had taken place between last Sunday and this? What had been his resolve then? How had his wicked design been so mercifully frustrated?—and why? What for? He threw himself down on a mossy bank against a tree. There was that wonderful stillness that, even in the quiet country, makes itself known on that one day in seven. The birds in the wood behind seemed joining in services of praise. The cattle were quietly grazing, or lying down from the great heat under the shady trees, as if they knew that man could not take from them the sweet rest-day as they did from the horses and their fellow-men. Roy felt full of unrest, and presently he made his way to the high road. Two or three bicycles passed, that was all, and he turned off at a short lane, until he reached the green, where the ivy-mantled church stood. He was half inclined to go in, for the sermon would not be over yet; but he feared he might mistake the door, and enter by the one where all eyes might be turned on him. So he sat under an old yew-tree, with his thoughts buried in the past, as they ever must be in a church-yard. He wondered what kind of lives those had led, whose "little day was over." No doubt their aspirations and ambition had been higher than the lofty monuments which, in many cases, bore testimony to mighty deeds, raised by sons in loving memory of a noble and honourable father. A scornful look came over Roy, as he tossed back

his head, while his lip curled, and then quivered; he moved round to shut those kind of epitaphs out of his sight.

Surely there were many whose lives had been tempest-tossed, shipwrecked, who had fallen "weary with the march of life." Perhaps this is one, thought he, as a nameless grave caught his eyes close to him. The grass had grown over it for years. Not any stone—only a number. Would that be his fate some day—that his end? Forgotten, out of sight, but he—himself?

Roy shivered and closed his eyes. When he opened them again he started. He had slightly shifted his position, and before him, on a marble pedestal, was a Bible, so beautifully executed, so finely chiselled, that it seemed as if the leaves would turn with the soft breeze. It was open, and on one side was engraved:—

" Word of the Everlasting God,
Will of Thy glorious Son;
Without Thee how can earth be trod
Or Heaven itself be won?"

On the other was simply inscribed:—

Born, 1820.

—

Born again, 1841.

Died, 1864.

The gaze of the young man was riveted on the three lines with their significant meaning, and his thoughts flew to the dusty Bible on that upper shelf; for therein was a similar inscription—two inscribed—but one only contained the first line. When would the second be added? He folded his arms, and looked again at the nameless grave. At this moment the organ commenced playing, and almost directly a slight figure

came, with flying leaps over the graves, to the other side of the churchyard, and then disappeared through a hedge.

Roy called to him as he darted past. Was it possible he did not hear? He rose, and went out at the centre gate with the rest of the congregation.

"It is the boy, Edward," said a lady in front to her husband.

"Like him, I confess; but young Radcliffe is not so tall."

"It is a year ago since I've stayed there; and think how boys grow in a few months. I am sure that is Rex."

"Well, if so, his mother and father must be here, and Reginald would be waiting for them."

The lady and gentleman stood aside on a plot of grass until the last of the congregation quitted the church. Even then the former walked back into the edifice and looked round.

"Do you think they are remaining for the evening service?" laughed her husband, joining her.

"No; but Sir Roland is so fond of quaint architecture and inscriptions impossible to decipher. I fancied he might be absorbed in that queer old slab behind the pulpit."

Roy went home full of thought. Ought he to have spoken? Ought he to give up this boy, who was drawing him nearer and nearer with strange invisible chords? Thoughts quite new to him had come through him. He would never have entered that churchyard but for him. Nor would he have ever seen the monument but for Rex. And what had it not recalled? Surely he had not been led there to betray the child, who seemed sent as a guardian angel to remind him of a mother's prayers?

Roy went across a field and then came again into the high road, passing once more the lady and gentleman.

They were arranging to walk over to Southmoor for evening service, a little village three miles distant.

When he reached home, Rex was lying on the grass, having a conversation with his "General."

"Well Rob, was the church on fire that you flew out of it as if for your life?"

Rex jumped up with a flushed face.

"Were you at church, Roy? I never saw you."

"You were seen though, old man, and by more eyes than mine. Four optics saw you inside and two outside in the churchyard."

A frightened look came over Rex's face. But he did not speak.

"Never mind, Rob. The last were my eyes, and the others are far away and will not trouble you again to-day."

Rex beamed upon Roy. It was a glance of unspoken gratitude like he had seen in his face before. It was one of the outward chords that he felt was drawing them together, and another chord that was playing upon his heart, making so many hard notes soft.

He had placed his arm inside his with a confiding look half mingled with an unspoken one for protection.

Roy was in an undecided troubled state. How could he wrench that little arm away by a word?

After dinner he threw himself down on the sofa to try and think it out.

Rex went off with the "General," looking carefully down the road; then went over a stile into a field running parallel, where he could watch the cyclists without always being visible. Not any could he discover with red cross-bars. But they whirled past with such rapidity it was difficult to discover.

He saw two men at some distance—one on a bicycle and the other on a tricycle—stop at the gate of a large field. They brought them in and placed them against a tree, lighted their pipes, and sauntered towards a thick plantation. Rex

ran as fast as he could to examine them. There were little red lines on one, but not any cross-bars or "Dumpey" on it. He was sorry. What fun to have run away with it, had Roy's name been on it, and returned it to him in triumph.

Just as he entered the wood he heard the voices of children, and to his surprise and delight recognized Dot. She had a little three-year-old boy by her side, whom she left on the grass, and ran to him clapping her hands.

"Did you get safe home?" was her eager question. "Did any of them see you?"

"Not that I know of. But you see I am safe and sound—not shot at."

"I was so afraid you might tumble into a pit, or over a trap. Oh, Rob! do you know what you did?"

"No. Why did you send me off so quickly and look so frightened?"

"You struck Jumper."

"What are you dreaming of, Dot? I never saw any man to strike."

"That's just it. Had you seen him you would never have flung back that money to me. It struck him right on the forehead, and he fell back on a box, which gave me time to send you away. Had he ran forward instead, he would have seen you, and I believe you would have been half killed, for he had been drinking whiskey all the morning. He declared I did it and shook me to bits."

"Oh, Dottie, dear! I am so sorry," said Rex gravely. "You punished for what I did? Why did you not tell him that I threw the money in?"

"I was not going to tell against you," said Dot, with a sweet little smile. "He went rushing after the person who I said had thrown it in, and he tumbled down the stairs, he thought it was a stone. I took out the money, and I have your handkerchief in my pocket—here it is."

And Dot dived into her small receptacle for treasures and brought out a tiny white ball with R. R. in the corner.

"Is that your little brother?" enquired he.

"I don't know. I think not," hesitated Dot.

"What! Don't you know your own brother and sisters?" laughed Rex. "Perhaps you don't know your own mother, Miss Dot?"

"No, that's just what I don't know," replied the little girl, folding her hands on her lap—for they were sitting on the grass now. "Yes, you may laugh, but it is quite true. I seem to have had a great many mothers. I often puzzle over them till I begin to think I never had one at all. I asked Mrs. Jumper till I was tired, and at last she said I was like Joshua in the Bible—the son of *None*. Then they all screamed with laughter and called me the daughter of *None*, so I have never asked again."

"They must be very wicked people to laugh about things in the Bible, for it does not mean anything of the kind. I will show it you, Dot, some day, and explain it," said Rex, as if he were mother and father combined.

"Do you understand the Bible?" said Dot, opening her eyes.

"Yes, lots of it."

"How do people know it's true?"

"Because it is," replied Rex conclusively; "and when people can't make out the long words, they look in the *accordian*, and it tells them."

"That is wonderful," cried Dot. "There's an old *accordian* at the 'Haunted House.' I'll look in it and see about Joshua; but I think you must make a mistake, it can't be there."

"Every word is there," was the decisive answer. "When my father and mother are puzzled over anything they look in the *accordian*, and then read if the commentators agree with them."

"Common taters?" cried Dot, the violet eyes opening wider than ever. "What a strange book, and what has that to do with the Bible? I am sure that does not speak of common

taters. Mrs. Jumper says common taters never agree with her like kidney taters. Oh, Rob! what are you laughing at now?"

Rex was about to explain.

But the little three-year-old began to cry, and Dot jumped up to amuse him, saying if he once began to scream he never stopped. So the conversation was diverted into quite another channel—glimpses of the interior of the "Haunted House," which quite mystified Rex. Something she said of the queer way they had of travelling about reminded him of the purpose of his walk, and he told her, asking her if she had ever seen a tricycle with red cross-bars.

"Never, till yesterday," answered Dot, "and then Jumper's son, or both of them, brought home a beauty. Yes, with red lines like this," added she, crossing her fingers. "Can it be the one you are looking for? Can they have stolen it? If they have I will manage to get it back for you."

"No, Dot, they will beat you; tell me where it is and I will find it."

"You would never do that if they choose to hide it. There is only one chance of your getting it, and that is very early to-morrow morning; they had not hidden it last night, for I saw it this afternoon in the shed.

"But, Dot," interrupted Rex, "they will be sure to have gone out on it."

"No, they haven't. They had a hard day of it yesterday, a long way off—Mr. Jumper with his donkey. They sing duets together, at least he sings, and the donkey brays just at the right time—it is funny. Jumper thinks Daisy (that's the donkey) will talk some day. I do love her. I wish you could see her in the ring, eating carrot pie with Jumper, after she has sung the chorus—for though it is only a bray it takes tremendously, and gets Daisy an encore as if she were a *prima donna*, as Jumper says; but she never cares for being encored, she blinks and winks at him as much as to say, 'Never mind

them, let us go on with the pie.' I could tell you lots more, but there are the dark shadows over the pond yonder, so it is nearly six o'clock. If I can I will see if the names you say are on the tricycle. Yes, I remember, 'Dumpey' and 'Roy.' If they are I shall know it's yours. You must be here by five to-morrow morning. Come this way."

"Yes," said Rex, "I know it, and——"

"No, you don't," interrupted Dot. "It is quite a different way to the one you came from the other town, and by the tea gardens. How were you going to get a tricycle over those bramble paths? Come to the end of the wood with me and I will show you."

Rex followed, taking up the little boy in his arms, who was at first inclined to resent the strange conveyance, but the beaming face re-assured him. They came out on a picturesque spot of table-land, which sloped down to the "Haunted House."

"Do you see that row of trees down that long field?" asked Dot.

"Yes," said Rex, "seven of them."

"Well, there's a narrow path on the other side, quite clear, and leads up to the five-barred gate in the road you came by, up there," continued Dot, indicating the direction.

"And am I supposed to lift those big wheels over the great gate?" asked Rex drily, "for I suppose it is not open."

"No, it is always kept locked and covered with fuzzy buzzy thorns, but perhaps a fairy will open it for you," cried Dot, waving a hazel cane she had been peeling. "I will try and wake early, and when you go up to the gate this wand shall make it open in a mysterious manner," added she in a stage voice.

"And what if you go on sleeping?" asked Rex, getting excited with the idea of the coming adventure.

"I'll send the bear to help you climb over," laughed Dot, then after a minute, said gravely, "You must be very careful—do just as I say. If I am not there, only wait a few moments,

then if you do not see me crossing the field, waving my hat, look at the woodwork on the right side, and you will see there is a hole near the ground, stopped up with briars and a stone. Take it out and put your hand through and feel for an iron ring. That you must pull up. Stand as it rises, and you will see the gate open. A very little way will do for you, and when you creep through mind you shut it, and when you return with the tricycle you can pull it as wide as you want it. After you have passed all those trees—there are more than seven—you will come to an old plough by a broken-down fence. Then you must not come any further unless I am there to quiet the dogs. If they are chained up on the other side of the house I will tie a piece of red flannel to the end of the plough to tell you you may go on in case I may not be there. The shed is just round the corner. Oh! I hope no harm will come to you through me," concluded the little girl. "Mind you do not look about at any of the funny things you may see. Jump on the tricycle and fly—only, if you have time unfasten the bit of flannel off the plough that I may know it is you who have taken it, and that you are safe. Now, good-bye till five to-morrow morning. Take care you do not go on sleeping till eight, or you will lose it for ever."

"Well Rob, what have you been up to?" enquired Roy, looking up from the sofa, from which he had never stirred, and wondering what had produced the rich colour and the sparkling eyes.

"I have been in the wood. It is jolly."

And Rex, not wishing for any more questions, took up a book until tea-time.

"How far is the next village?" asked he.

"Three miles there and back again. Too far for you to go there to church, if that is what you are contemplating," replied Roy. "You have been on the march ever since dinner, so I expect you had better keep still."

"I am not tired. I'd like to go over there to church."

Roy thought for some minutes. He fancied he knew the reason why the boy was so quiet. How could he let him be caught in a trap, so at last he said,

"Rob, old man, if you are intending to go to the other church only to get out of the way of those people who seemed to know you this morning, you will most likely have their company along the road, for they are going over there to evening service."

Rex coloured, as he flashed on Roy a glance that he was learning to love, and who, to save him from confusion, added quickly,

"We will go together, Rob, to this church."

"All right," said the boy, not in the least aware that Roy had said anything out of the common, or what an effort it had been for him to come to that decision and to utter it.

"Would you rather stay and read your book?" added he presently. "Are you tired? Perhaps you have never been in the evening? Not often, I mean," added Roy, fearing he was touching tender ground, and as he expected, the boy tossed back his head.

"Of course I always go—ever since I was seven."

"If there isn't Mr. Royston going to church," said the landlady to her husband.

"I doubt it, wife," was the reply. "Much more likely gone to sho. the youngster a bird's nest in some out-of-the-way nook. No, I'll bet you a new gown they have gone after that tricycle, and no wonder."

"And I'll bet you a new hat, husband, they have not gone after either. I saw the little boy with his book—bless his little heart. However, we shall see."

It was not Mrs. Young's habit to talk in church, but on this particular Sunday evening, just before the service commenced, she whispered to her husband,

"Jim, dear, you have lost your new hat and I have won my new gown."

Jim looked at her dubiously and followed her triumphant glance to an old-fashioned square pew near the pulpit, into which Rob and Roy were being shown. Their attention was at once drawn to a large tablet of very ancient date, in black and white marble. In the centre was a small table or altar, on the left of which a man was kneeling, and behind him in the same posture were his four wives, while opposite knelt several children.

The inscription, half in Latin, half in Old English, was a puzzle, not throwing any light upon the bas-relief. The vicar objected to strangers being placed in the pew, as he declared that half the service was taken up examining the peculiar representation, and wondering whether the tablet was in memoriam of the last lamented wife, or of the desolate widower himself, and that during the sermon they were trying to translate or decipher the inscription.

That was just what Roy was doing. Rex made quick work of it. He thought it had to do with Henry VIII., only he looked so thin; counted up his wives, and finding two missing, concluded that Catharine Howard and Catherine Parr came afterwards; that it was a very silly thing to put in a church, and turned from it to a far more interesting tablet, upon which a battle was represented, and a long inscription of a brave life ended there, and which reminded him of his "General."

The wandering thoughts of both were suddenly called home by the voice from the pulpit.

"'Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, my Father, be thou the guide of my youth.'"

A shiver ran through Roy as he folded his arms and bent his head, but ere long his eyes were fastened on the speaker, listening to words he had never heard or heeded before.

It seemed to him as if the preacher were acquainted with

all the history of his past sad life, and was placing before him a new page of his existence—a new Father—a new name—and a grand career opening before him from that day.

Towards the end he glanced at Rex, expecting to find him asleep, but his cheeks and eyes were glowing, trying to keep back his tears at the vivid picture of a united home, cemented by a mother's love and a father's protecting care, so it had carried him off to another church, where only last Sunday he had knelt between that guardian love.

Was his mother ill as his father feared she would be? Then the thought of the thrashing he was to get if he went home dried up the gathering tears, and folding his arms like Roy, held up his head proudly with a half-defiant look at the pulpit, as if he were saying, "I am not going home for all that;" and the clergyman wondered who was that handsome intelligent boy, with such a wealth of thought shining through his lustrous eyes.

The two walked home in silence at first. Rex was thinking of his coming adventure in the early morning, and Roy was in a kind of dream, trying to realize that he was the same person as only a week before, and yet he seemed different. Why was he doing and thinking what he had scarcely ever done, and never thought of before? and all apparently brought about through the unconscious influence of the child at his side. He put his arm over his shoulder, and Rex linked his arm in his until they reached home.

That night, long after the boy was fast asleep, Roy sat at the open window instead of going to rest as he had intended before he came upstairs.

He stood at the foot of the small bed watching the little face. Every now and then a smile would cross it—thoughts of the morrow no doubt. One arm was resting on the "General" and his Testament, and Roy's eye went from it to the Bible on the shelf. At last he took it down, and taking it to the window, held it in his hands while he watched a large silver

cloud becoming brighter and brighter, and then the grand full moon came from behind it in all its glory, and Roy opened the Bible at its title-page, and then turning the leaf read his mother's name, just similar to that in the church-yard. Then came his own name, the date of his birth, then two spaces. He turned cold. What might not have been written there only two short days ago? Instead of that, new life seemed dawning upon him, and he followed with a loving glance the moonbeams playing over the sleeping child, and then he read the names of a little sister and brother with the date of their deaths.

Then he took out of the third chapter of St. John a letter from his mother, and read it over several times, kissing it fondly as he replaced it, the hot tears falling upon it. Finally he clasped the Bible to his heart, murmuring "Yes, mother, to-day, to-night, your prayers are answered," and he knelt down and wrote a date in the vacant space of his name and buried his head in his hands. And the moonbeams, as they rested lovingly o'er his head, saw that the word on the dusty Bible was blotted out for ever.

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

"**R**EX! Oh, where is Rex? Please tell him to come back. Oh, father, has he been tossed up in a tree by a bull?"

"No; he has fallen into the pond and drowned."

"Oh, not drowned! Say he isn't drowned, mother—say—oh, say——"

A prolonged howl and sobs in various keys issued from the nursery party at Radcliffe Hall. It was Sunday afternoon, usually so happy, when they all assembled in the drawing-room for reading and stories, but to-day it was sad enough.

The family pew in the morning contained a vacant seat, upon which all eyes rested. It was next Sir Roland. He looked down at it once and a flush passed over his face. Then he glanced at his wife, and saw that her head was bent, and that a tear had fallen on her prayer-book.

He thought to enliven and comfort the whole party by reading the wonderful documents Rex had left behind. Certainly the letter put out of their heads the idea that some terrible fate had overtaken him, and smiles had come again as Katie remembered all he had said in the nursery about winning the Victoria Cross.

Their father had told them of his wonderful feat with the bear, and how he had nobly protected the little girl—at least, he added, it was supposed to be their brother.

"Do you think he is at sea, mother?" asked Katie. "He says he shall always go to church except when he is at sea."

"I believe he is not many stations off," replied Sir Roland. "Now, you shall have his Will."

"A person only makes a Will when he is dead," said Arthur, aged seven, which clever suggestion was received with a shout of laughter by Katie.

"You stupid. You mean, I suppose, a Will is only read then, on the day that the person who makes it is buried."

Whereupon the four-year-old twins commenced roaring in company, declaring Rex was dead and buried.

Sir Roland and Lady Radcliffe could not help laughing again at many points in that novel production. It was only the elder ones who could enter into the comicality of the testator saying he had taken such and such things away with him, but they did laugh when their father called himself the executor of the Will.

He and Lady Radcliffe were pleased to see how really fond they all were of their truant brother, though he had teased their little lives out at times, but not one farthing of his money, not a single toy would they touch. Sir Roland did offer them a ride on "Beauty" on Saturday, but the pony seemed to share the family anxiety, and went on in such a spiritless manner, refusing to go anywhere but the old routes of his little master, which of course were the most dangerous, leaped over little stones and ditches, and gave all kinds of quirks, threatened to shy more than once, so she was left to herself.

"Katie, I think you ought to have the money Rex has left you for dolls' eyes," continued her father, as he folded up The Will.

"I won't have a farthing of his money," cried Katie, with a burst of tears. I shall keep all my blind dolls in remembrance of him till he comes back, or they shall all go into mourning

for him. I shall begin making black dresses for them on Monday."

Whereupon there were tones and semi-tones of infant grief.

"Oh, Katie," said her mother, "do not say such dreadful things and make your little brothers and sisters so unhappy. I cannot bear it. I wish, Roland, you had never tried such an experiment as reading that Will to amuse the children."

Monday morning brought a local paper, which he tossed to his wife.

"Here is something to cheer you. We will have all the upper storey down to listen," and going into the hall he sounded the gong with its musical accompaniment, which was always understood by the nursery to be a special call for the little inhabitants thereof. Consequently the whole band swept down the stairs, quite a cataract, more like Rex himself.

"Come along, children, and hear of the wonderful exploits of a little boy."

"It's Rex!"

"Yes, it's our Rex," said the group surrounding their father.

"I expected to see him," said Katie, in a disappointed tone.

"Well, this is next best. Whoa, there! Remember I am not the horse up in the nursery, and I am not a doll to have my hair pulled out by the roots," added Sir Roland, holding out his arms to the twins, who were climbing on to his shoulder.

Then he read an elaborate account of what they termed the wonderful pluck displayed by a little boy of only nine years of age, and then the account of Rex's exploits with Dot and the bear, which brought out no end of varied comments from the small fry, and quite re-assured them as to his still being in the land of the living. They were so merry over it, and acted bear all day, that Lady Radcliffe caught the infection.

Quite a flame of hope rose in the heart of husband and wife ; which was fanned to the utmost by him.

"We shall have the little rascal home like a shot now that he is in the papers. He will be bringing one home, waving it out of the train—a small shadow of the Victoria Cross."

"I have been thinking," said Sir Roland some hours later, "that you had better ask the Desmonds here for a bit. You two schoolfellows can cheer each other up, as you happen to be just at present rowing in the same boat, though your loss is only a matter of hours compared with hers."

"Yes. Oh, yes," almost gasped his wife. "Fancy not to hear of Rex for eight years. It would kill me."

"It has not killed Nora ; and the same sustaining Hand will hold you up, my darling, be the time long or short," said her husband.

So Colonel and Mrs. Desmond were asked, accepted, and arrived in the course of the next three days.

The morning after their arrival Sir Roland was reading an advertisement he had written out to be posted up in all directions, with a full description of the truant heir of the house, and the promise of a handsome reward to whoever brought him safely back, or who could give such intelligence as would lead to his discovery. When the post-bag was brought in, and the first letter taken out, he handed it to his wife with his eyes full of delighted surprise, saying,

"I wonder if you have ever seen that handwriting before? Perhaps I had better read it to you, considering that it is addressed to me, or rather to us both."

"No, no, you shall not have it," half laughing and crying with joy. "Oh, Nora, it is from Rex," kissing it, then opened it and kissed it again.

"You had better let papa kiss it now," suggested Katie, who had been looking on from the window.

"No, he is going to do the horse-whipping," suggested the Colonel drily.

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—I hope you are quite well, as I am, so do not fret about me. I was never better in my life. I was very sorry to hear you were not well. I should have gone home with father when he said so, but——"

"Why, what does the boy mean?" interrupted Sir Roland.

"How could he have heard?"

"Someone told him I suppose. Let me go on," said his wife.

"But when I *heard* father say he would thrash me, I resolved not to return with him. The 'General' was never thrashed, and I am sure was too fond of his children ever to cane them. I will look and see if he says like you do, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child.' I mean to spare the rod by not coming home, for you said, *Go and do likewise*, so I have gone, having had, like Abraham, a higher call to save lives. You will see by the newspapers that I have saved one, at least people say so, though the bear did not try to hug Dot. I stood between. Tell Katie she is a most lovely little girl, far prettier than her doll Ariminta, whose right eye I shot out. I am sorry now, especially as there is a great look of Dot in her, only her hair is more gold and shiny, and her eyes like two great full-blown violets."

"Oh," cried Mrs. Desmond, turning quite white, "How like what my little Dorothy would be now; but there the comparison ceases, for Rex's sharp eyes would have detected in a minute anything so unusual as a lock of white hair. He may mention it yet. Go on——"

"I fear not, dear," said her husband feelingly, glancing across the next two pages. She may have grown out of it, though," added Lady Radcliffe, remarking the tears that had come into her sad eyes. "Perhaps it is all gold now."

"No; the doctor said she would never lose it. I was sorry then, but I see now it was all for the best; it may serve as a clue to her identity."

"You shall see this child, Nora," said her husband. "We can find her out I suppose?"

"Yes. Write to Rex and ask her whereabouts."

"Write to Rex! Oh, let me, father," said Katie, "and I will tell him I quite forgive him killing my dolls, if he will only come home. Let us go and fetch him."

"Sooner said than done," replied her mother. "He gives no address. Yes, what is that at the beginning?"

"'Top of a haystack,'" read Sir Roland, looking over his wife's shoulder. "About as easy to find as the proverbial needle inside. Tiresome monkey! What more about this young lady?"

"He is beginning early," laughed the Colonel.

"Dot is very frightened of the bear. He is so ugly. They always threaten her with him when they want to punish her, not for being naughty, but because she can't do all the tricks. I went to church morning and evening as I promised. I am on a visit to a gentleman who is awfully nice and kind. Why a great chap should take a fancy to a little one I cannot guess. He says I saved his life. I don't know what he means, for there are not any bears or wild animals here. I am glad I was able to do him a good turn to-day. I will tell you about it next time, or when I see you.

"Your loving son, with the same to everybody,

"Rex."

"I wish he had said something more about that poor little Dot," sighed Mrs. Desmond.

"You and I will go on a voyage of discovery," said the Colonel to his wife, "and try and find out this Dot. We have all forgotten the postmark. That will be a clue."

"I had not forgotten it," said Sir Roland. Look, it is only 'London.'"

"That is only a ruse," suggested his wife. "Where would he find a haystack to write from in London?"

"In the Haymarket, my love."

"Or on *Cornhill*," added the Colonel, "trying to bring a smile to the quivering lips of his wife."

* * * * *

It was only just light when Rex awoke on Monday. He saw that Roy was fast asleep, so he got up and dressed himself very quietly, and was so thankful when at last he stood ready outside the closed bedroom door. Roy would never have let him off at so early an hour without questions that would have been most difficult to answer. And Rex was quite right in his surmise.

He hoped the Youngs were fast asleep too, and that there were not a quantity of bars and bolts to unfasten downstairs like at his home. To his delight there were not any bars, only two simple bolts, which after squeaking a little yielded, and then, by holding the handle firm in his hand, he found that the door shut without a bang.

Then he leaped over each flower bed at the success which had attended his early departure. How he flew through the plantation and across the wide meadow-land till he came to the wood of the "Haunted House," when he remembered that Dot had told him to cross the corn-field as the nearest and safest way to the back of the building, so he had to retrace his steps.

He saw Dot looking out in the other direction.

"I am the bear come to hug you," cried Rex, creeping up to her, and laughing at her startled look, and then the sunny smiles.

"Oh, Rob, who would think you would find out that path? it is secret, and not wide enough for even my doll. Look, I have opened the gate for you. This is the spring, pray do not wait to try it or you will not get the tricycle. I have food for the dogs, and as they have already seen me and had some, they will not growl and bark at you."

"Have you seen the tricycle, Dot?"

"That is left for you to find, as I show you the way," said Dot, with a mischievous laugh and a jump.

"Then I'll run on," cried Rex, suiting the action to the word.

"Oh, stop, stop!" almost screamed Dot, rushing after him. "I was only in fun. You must not go on an inch without me. There are traps you cannot see. If you went in without me the dogs would fly at you. You never seem frightened at anything."

Rex felt as if he had grown a foot since he left home, and certainly must be five years older.

"There is the piece of red," said Dot, as they approached the broken plough.

"Now come and see the tricycle."

"Supposing this is not yours after all," said Dot. "There may be two alike. Will you run away with this cross-bar one because they have stolen yours?"

"No, Dot. I must not take it if it is not Roy's; that would be stealing."

"But is it wrong to steal from thieves?"

"Yes, of course it is," said Rex, resolved to think out the novel idea at night. "Though, of course, if a thief took your watch and you had the opportunity, you might hook it from him again. *That* would not be stealing."

"Then here is your very own, close by," said Dot. "Wait—take these bones and bit of meat, and give it to the dogs."

The animals showed their teeth and would have barked, had not Dot had the forethought of keeping Rex close to her, and allowing him to feed them, then they were quiet in a minute, and were well supplied from the basket on her arm.

"If we had time, we could have played at hot beans and butter, hot and cold," said Dot, "until you found the tricycle. You are cold, now"—as Rex made a dart into what was

once a stall for horses, but was filled with an indescribable jumble of stage and circus furniture. "Come along. Jumper might be getting up, just because he isn't wanted. Now you are hot—hotter—hottest," cried she, as Rex came in front of the shed, where his eyes were gladdened by the sight of the tricycle.

Yes. There were the two names, "Dumpey" and "Roy." It was all right, and his eyes danced with delight. It was with difficulty the two children dragged it out and over the uneven ground; but they gained the level at last.

"Now, get on in front," said Rex. "We will have a jolly ride to the gate. I am so glad it is a double."

"No. I can't," said Dot, with a longing look at it. "I must go and shut the shed. I unlocked it for you, and had such a hunt for the key. Now I must go and put it all where I found it. They will never suspect me, and will get into an awful rage with each other. I will go to the end of the avenue, and then run back as fast as I can. The gate is ajar, so it will open quite easily."

The two children went on at a quick pace, Rex wheeling the tricycle, when Dot, looking back, gave a loud scream, and Rex saw with dismay, not any of the men as he expected, but Dot's four-footed enemy, the bear, shambling along. Now to face the animal in a ring, held by a rope and surrounded with spectators, was very different to facing or being run after by him in open ground, and Rex's heart beat very fast, and then seemed to stand still; and he remembered what Dot had said to him just now, that he was "never afraid of anything," and then something else came to his remembrance.

"Get up, Dot. Make haste."

"Oh! he'll catch us, and hug us, and eat us," cried the little girl in agony.

"Not if you are quick," said Rex, giving her a shove and a lift.

Thanks to Dot's training, and to Rex's monkey proclivities, they were both on the tricycle in far less time than it has taken to write. Fortunately too, the bear paused and looked round him, evidently surprised at his liberty. Once he turned, and they hoped he was going back home; but alas, on he came at a trot, then he again stopped at a broad path.

"Oh! I wish he would go up there," cried Dot. "That leads the other way."

"I believe he is making for that tree," said Rex. "I hope he will climb it. Let us watch; it would be fun to see him arrive at the top—better than the Zoological Gardens."

"No, no! We must not wait, or we shall be caught. I wish the ugly beast would climb to the top and never come down any more," said Dot.

"What will you do when I am through the gate, Dot?"

"I don't know," said the little girl in a broken voice. "I hadn't thought of it. I can't go this way, that's certain. I must go round ever so far; and even then Bruin may come after me."

"I will take care of you, Dot," cried Rex, afraid to turn his head.

His desire for meeting wild animals seemed to be having a strange sort of fulfilment, beginning with the bear.

"Dot. Has your Mr. Jumper any lions and tigers?"

"He had once; but I don't think he has any now. The bear is quite enough for me."

"Don't think."

Rex did not like those two words. Supposing Dot was after all mistaken, and they should see a lion, or tiger, careering down, having escaped from their common den. What then? Certainly they were much nicer to read about in books than encounter the stern reality in an open field.

Bruin here changed his mind about going up the tree, and recommenced his shambling trot, as if in pursuit of the little cyclists.

"Oh! Dot, don't cry. He won't catch us up. We shall soon be safe."

"No, we shan't," sobbed she. "While I get down to open the gate wider, he will spring at me and carry me away—to—hug—and eat."

"No, he won't. I will open the gate and push you through," said Rex valiantly, "so he will eat me first."

"No, no!" sobbed Dot. "He shall never eat you. You have been so good to me. You are the only real friend I have in the world, and I know the ugly beast will turn the tricycle over and carry you away too."

"He won't carry either of us away. God will not let him."

They had nearly reached the gate, when a man's voice was heard in the distance.

"That's Jumper," cried Dot, in an agony of fear. "He is worse than the bear. He will nearly kill me."

"No. God will not let him. He will take care of both of us. Do not look like that, Dottie, dear," said Rex, whose voice seemed quite different, and not to belong to him at all.

For the man kept roaring and the bear began running. Could they ever reach the gate, or, what was more, go through it? Suddenly there was a snarl and a dreadful howl. Which of the children's hearts were beating the fastest would have been difficult to determine. Their faces were both white enough. Dot was too terrified even to cry, expecting the machine would in a moment be turned over by her deadly enemy, and they both killed. As they came up to the gate, Rex looked round.

"Oh! Dot, the bear is ever so far off, standing still and howling; and the man has stopped too. I believe he is caught in one of those awful traps. But they are dear old traps to catch Bruin. Let us make haste and get on."

Rex's courage rose and fell according to the bear's distance. Now he jumped off, opened the gate, pushed the

tricycle and Dot through, closed it, and then mounted. The ground had slanted downwards considerably ; so at the gate the man and the bear were not visible. How the two children rejoiced. Was he yelling after them or the animal ? Had he seen them after all ?

"He must have seen us," said Dot.

"Perhaps he missed the bear first, so only thought of him," suggested Rex.

But that idea was put out of his head by hearing him call very loudly, "Dot ! Dot !" over the field.

"He must have seen us then," groaned she.

"Never mind, you shall come with me, I will protect you," said Rex. "It is all down hill, we will have a jolly ride yet ; don't you look so scared."

"But, Rob, I shall have to go back, and I shall get in for it, and be starved and beaten."

"Then you shall stay with me, and I will take you back and make old Jumper promise not to punish you."

"Oh, Robin, he might hurt you then, and I would rather have bread and water than that they should do anything to you."

As they irled down the hill skirting the field, they heard the voice of two men shouting, "Stop thief ! stop thief !" which made Rex double his speed. Some labourers looked after them.

"If those youngsters don't come to grief, it won't be no fault of theirs."

When Roy awoke, while it was still early, he was surprised to see Rex's bed empty. The thoughts of the night came back to him, for he had had a sweet dream of his mother, that he was sorry to awake. A great weight had been lifted, one that had bowed him to the earth. A huge stone had been rolled away from the grave of a buried hope, uplifted and rolled away by the hand of a little

child. He gave himself up to a hazy mist of gathering thoughts—of a new life, a new future that was unfolding before him. Then flashed in the remembrance of the small author of it all. Where could he be?

He sprang up and looked out of the window. He could neither be seen or heard, so he opened his room door and called,

"Rob! Rob!"

"The young gentleman is not down here, sir," said the voice of Mrs. Young, coming out of the kitchen.

"I expect he is out. He got up early and was attracted by the beauty of the morning," said Roy.

"Yes, sir; that no doubt accounts for the door being unbolted. My husband declared he locked up safely last night, and at six this morning it was on the latch."

"So early as that!" said young Royston alarmed, hastening back to his room. Surely the boy had not run off again. A strange feeling came over him—how those speaking eyes, those winsome, yet daring ways, had wound round his heart. Great was his relief to find the "General" safe and sound. Then his little captain could not be far off, and sure enough, in a few minutes, he heard a great noise of shouting, then "Roy! Roy! See the conquering hero comes! Open the door quick!"

Roy hastened to the window, and to his great surprise saw Rob on his tricycle, with a little girl. What did it all mean?

"Make haste and let us in, enemies are running after us."

"Please let us in," cried Dot. "The bear has escaped and is running after us."

Mrs. Young had heard the noise and, well-pleased that it was Rob back again, the door was speedily opened, but her surprise was great to see his companion.

"How is it you have been so clever as to find Mr. Royston's tricycle?"

"It is all through Dot. She told me where it was. She got up at four this morning, never had any sleep all night for

fear she should not wake in time. She unlocked the door of the stall where the thieves had hidden it, and just as we were off the bear ran after us, and then the men rushed out and roared after us, and if they catch Dot they will nearly kill her."

"Oh, I hope they won't make me sleep with the bear," interrupted the little girl.

Rex had been speaking very fast, not pausing to take breath.

"Sleep with a bear, little one," said Mrs. Young. "You surely must be the little girl who Master Rob rescued from the creature before, though he pretends to be somebody else?"

"Yes," said Dot quickly, "he did it all. I know Bruin would have hugged me if he had not been between, and he would have eaten me up to-day, but Rob was like a conjurer. Oh, he was brave. You should have seen him, sir, push your tricycle through the gate. It could not have been done better in the ring, and it was all to save me," concluded Dot, recovering her colour, as she looked up with admiring gratitude into the face of her hero.

"We must get inside the house," said Roy, "if the thieves are after this machine again, and that poor child. Go in, both of you, while I go round with it to the shed."

"Oh, Mr. Royston, sir, don't be going to the shed with it," said Mr. Young, who had been drawn from the field by the clatter, and was listening with eager interest to the two children. "There is room for it under the loft, the door is cased with iron, so the gentry who have spotted it will not find it again. They would have it out of the shed as easily as peas jump out of a pod. Wife, keep that little girl till we know where her home is. She may be stolen."

"Is the owner of the bear your father, dearie?" asked Mrs. Young.

"Oh, no, no! he is worse than the bear who snarls, but never swears. My father is a gentleman," added Dot, with a

proud bend of her beautifully-formed little head. "They always call me the 'Princess,' so I suppose he must have been a prince."

"And to think we should have our hats on in the presence of Her Royal Highness," said Roy, taking his off.

"Supposing we all go into my sitting-room, and we shall be safe there from bears and robbers."

"It strikes me she has been transplanted," remarked Mr. Young. "That fragile little plant was never reared in a bear garden; more like in an orchid house, just like one of them graceful white orchids with pink spots, and the cup beneath."

"Yes, I was called a *kid* often," said Dot. "Why are you laughing so, Rob? You are a 'kid' too."

"Not an *orchid*, Dot, you little goose," said Rex. "Mr. Young means those snaky-looking things that hang from pieces of wood, and then turn into flowers."

"Oh, I'm not like a snake, that is ugly, even if it is transformed into a flower. I have been surrounded by snakes, but I have killed them all with my magic wand, or they have turned into ladders by which I have escaped from the giant's castle."

"I should like to have been there," said Rex. "Were you in a real castle, with real giants?"

"There's a man," cried Dot, with a look of terror, darting at Mrs. Young. "You will not give me up to Jumper, will you, or to any of them?"

"No, dearie, not if I know it. That was only one of our men who passed the window. I wish I could hand you over to your own people, poor little thing," said Mrs. Young, taking Dot on to her lap, and putting her arms round her.

"I wonder if you can remember your own mother?"

"I used to think I could, but now I can't. I seem to have had a lot of mothers, at least they said they were, and then suddenly they sent me away and said they were not."

"Don't you remember being loved ever so much?" asked

Rex, with a loving picture before him, the flash of a great contrast. "Have you never had an awful fuss made over you, and been thought no end of?"

"Yes," said Dot. "I have had awful fusses made over me, been bought and sold over and over again, and been thought no end of; such lots of money was given for me, and always rows over it. Is that what you like, Robin? I don't."

There was almost an unthought of, unspoken reproach in the voice of little Dot, an unknown undefinable yearning for the love she had never known. It struck a chord in the heart of Mr. Young, and Roy thought of his little sister whose name was in the Bible, and on a stone at the head of a flower-covered grave.

"I think I was loved once," continued the little one, answering with her large blue eyes the half-questioning hug of the motherly woman. "But it was a great many years ago," sighed Dot, as if she were quite old. "I lived with an old lady I called 'granny,' in the country like this, and who gave me everything I wanted, and kissed and hugged me all day. She used to say, 'My sweet duckie, I could eat you up, bones and all.' I have often wished since that she had, she would have done it more gently than the bear."

"But you are not yet eaten up by the bear," interrupted Rex, "and you shall never be, as long as I live. Go on about granny."

"Her daughter used to come, who called herself my mother; but if mothers are like her, I say better never to have a mother. She was not kind to granny, and used to say, 'It all comes along of that there bothering child. I'll sell her, that I will.' Then poor granny would cry and hug me more than ever, and say, 'Oh, poor wee bairn, what will become of you when I am gone? I wish I could take you with me.' Then she died, and nobody has really loved me ever since," said Dot, with a start and shiver, as the man re-passed the window.

"Let us all have breakfast," said Mrs. Young. "This poor little soul must be very hungry."

"And so must you, Rob," said Roy. "What shall I say to you, old fellow, for getting my tricycle? It is all a mystery to me. We must have your story soon."

"If you do not mind, Mr. Royston, breakfast is all ready in the big kitchen, and my good man he's brought a fine ham in from where it has been hanging, and you promised to taste it."

"Then I shall be delighted to fulfil my promise," said Roy; "but you have chosen an unfortunate morning for your party. The poor ham will be attacked with a vengeance. Rob must be as hungry as a hunter, and so am I with watching for him."

They had a very merry party at breakfast. Mrs. Young placed Dot next her, with her back to the window, so that she should not be alarmed at any one passing.

"Now, Rob, tell me where you found my tricycle," said Roy at last.

"At the 'Haunted House.'"

"The 'Haunted House?'" repeated Roy in amazement.

"How can you go there without me?"

"I had to pay my debts," said Rex, with a smile at Dot. "It was somebody's property in my possession, and I had to go and give it up."

"That is all a riddle," said Roy.

"I told you I was going at the hotel."

"You said you were going to return some money to the little girl."

"That was me," said Dot; "and when he could not find me in the town, he came all the way to the 'Haunted House.'"

"How did you know she was there?"

"I didn't know it; but I was told they had gone to a far-off village, and the short cut to it was near the 'Haunted House.' So I thought I would take a morning peep at it, and there, at the window, I saw Dot."

"Wasn't it good of him to come in when he saw me?" said Dot, beaming on Rex. "He risked his life over and over again for me. He might have been caught in a trap, and nearly killed; or been hugged by the bear, and shot by Jumper——"

"One at a time, Missy, would do," said Mr. Young.

"He had seen all the dreadful blue flames and the ghosts the night before," said Dot, only shaking her head at the interruption; "but he braved them all, like the prince in the enchanted castle."

"He set the little princess free."

"And that's what Rob has done for me," added Dot, laughing at her own poetry.

"How came you to be with that Jumper?" said Rex.

"Ah! 'thereby hangs a tale,' as he says. I was being trained to act the 'Human Serpent,' because as they said all my bones were only gristle and would bend. They doubled me up in two until I could look from between my feet."

"I think I could do that," cried Rex, throwing down his knife and fork and bending down, thinking he was on the way to an easy accomplishment of the feat, turning head over heels instead.

"The idea of thinking you could do it. Why all your gristles are bones by this time," said Dot. "You must begin at three years old to do that trick, the practice of it is awful—just like what a hug from Bruin must be. I always dreaded a rehearsal of the 'Serpent.' All my bones were twisted, and all the blood went to my head and never seemed to leave it; and after Bini would make me go through trapeze tricks until I fell."

"What was the woman's name?" asked Mr. Young fiercely.

"They said her real name was Grub, at least his was; but they thought that did not sound grand to the public, so they put on the bills 'Monsieur and Madame Grubini.' But we of

the 'profession' called them, 'Grub,' 'Grubby,' and 'Beni.' When we wanted to warn each other that either of them was in the garden, we would sing out, 'There goes a Grub, walking on a cabbage leaf.' For a time I had not such dangerous things to do because there was a great fuss made about the feat called 'Bric-o-Brac.'"

"What's that?" enquired Rex. "You must teach me how to do it."

"It is very difficult and dangerous. Two little girls used to do it. It is all balancing, and a slip might kill you. That is what the public like. One puts her head on that of her sister, who is standing, and while balancing herself in this position the other mounts two chairs. One of them used to tremble all over, for besides that trick, she had to jump off a pedestal, turn somersaults, and do the splits, and stand on her hands and feet, with her chest in the air. Then the C. V. C. and the S. P. C. came down on them."

"Who are they?" enquired Mrs. Young.

"The societies—the——"

"I know," cried Rex, "the Society for *Promoting Cruelty* to Children, and the Society for *Preventing Christian Knowledge*."

"That does not sound quite right," said Dot, knitting her eyebrows.

"No, I should think it did not," said Roy, in a fit of laughter. "I expect Dot knows far more of the C. V. C. than you do. It is vig——"

"Yes," shot in Dot, "vig—— I know now—The Children's Vigilant Committee. When any new trick was on hand, and dangerous, they used to say, 'We must look out, or the "Vigilant" will be down on us, 'or the 'C. V.'s' for short. Well, they did come down and made a great fuss, and then next day a grand doctor came suddenly upon us at the music hall, just as if he had come up a trap-door. He had such a dear, kind face, and he says, 'My little

darling, how old are you?' and I told him I was seven; and then he asked me a lot of questions, and if I always 'vent through as much as I had that evening, and I said I often did a great deal more, and he patted my head, saying, 'Poor wee bairn.' I had done a lot of tricks that night, 'plunging the splits' and a trapeze performance, playing the violin all the time. Then he crossed the green-room to where the sisters were, and was just asking them what made them tremble, when in came the 'Grubbies,' looking so angry when they found out who he was, and he sent them away, though the doctor asked if he might examine one of them who he thought was not strong enough for the part she had to sustain. Grub would not allow it, but said if he liked he might come and witness a rehearsal at his own home. So he came, but it was all quite different to what it was at the hall, not nearly so high and lots of things much easier; but the doctor thought it all right I dare say, though he shook his head at the sisters and said Nellie was not strong enough, that there was something the matter with her heart—she turned all blue and shivered. He ran Mr. Grubbie through with such a lot of questions, that he had to confess we were not his children, and the doctor looked at me so—I am sure he will know me anywhere again—and patted my head, and gave me a shilling. Next day the 'Vigilant' came and looked and talked, and took what I said down in a book, and what Nellie and her sister said, and the 'Grubbies' were in a great wax and sent me out of the room, and——"

"I hope you ran out and spent that shilling in a knife and toffy," interrupted Rex; "but I suppose, being a girl, you bought a doll with it?"

"I didn't do either, Rob."

"What! have you got it still?"

"No," answered Dot, with a sweet smile and a blush. "I gave it to two poor little children, who never had any money, nor nothing nice."

"Did they belong to the Grubini troupe?" asked Roy.

"Yes, but they did not live with us. The eldest was only seven, and had to take care of her little sister of four, who was a shrimp in the pantomime, and she had six shillings a year, but the eldest had a lot more. When we were at the Crystal Palace they had to go into three trains to get home, and had to walk from Ludgate Hill to Leicester Square, and if they missed their trains would not get home till nearly twelve at night."

"Nobody went to meet them?" asked Mrs. Young. "What was their mother about?"

"She had a lot of children. Their father often promised to meet them, but he generally stopped half-way at the public-house, except on their pay nights, he was sure to go straight to them then, and that was just the night he was not wanted to go. How do you think they spent that shilling, Robin?"

"In a cab one night," said Rex, "or perhaps they gave it to a policeman to see them safe home."

"Oh, Rob, what grand ideas you have, fancy a cab! and a policeman would be more likely to take them to the station-house. He did one night."

"What a shame," cried Rex indignantly. "I wish I had been there to protect them. They had not stolen anything, had they, or rang the fire-bells for fun?"

"No, they were very good children. They would have starved rather than steal. Why, the policeman did it out of kindness, not to punish them. They said they had never spent such a happy night. They were put before a splendid fire. There were ever so many 'bobbies' sitting and standing about; and one gave them buns, and another milk, and then a lot of chestnuts, and they roasted them; but in the middle went off fast to sleep, and the 'bobbies' did not like to wake them, but put them on some of their coats and let them be till morning as it was snowing hard. This is what they spent their shilling on, Rob: Hot potatoes on

the other nights, and once or twice on a penny 'bus the potting nights. It was wonderful how long it lasted."

"The potatoes or the drive?" asked Rex.

"Both, for they got a large baked one for a halfpenny, and divided it; and then the little one of four sat in the other's lap in the 'bus, so the two rode for a penny. Often the passengers gave them money, for seeing all their paint and feathers they used to ask them questions."

"Did they not wash off the paint?" said Mrs. Young.

"No, not when they were at the Crystal Palace pantomime. There were from twenty to thirty children, and sometimes a great many more. We danced in two ballets. In the first we were shrimps, pearls, and seaweed—the pearls were in flesh-coloured tights. In the second we came on as little Red Indians, in dark skin tights, and decorated with feathers. After the performance, we all left the theatre with the black on our eyes, and the paint on our faces, like on the stage. We used to divide up in groups and stroll about the Palace; but we were generally too tired after the eight o'clock ballet, as there was always an afternoon performance as well, except certain days. Of course I and several others went home to the 'Grubbies.' One day Jumper came and told Mr. Grubb that he had been watching me for ever so long and would they sell me? They talked a lot, and I was sent for; and then, after ever so much talk, I was told to go away again. He seemed to be offering a lot of money; but the 'Grubbies' only shook their heads and said, 'No, no.' But a week after the 'Vigilant' came, and said that if ever I was made to act the 'Human Serpent' again, they should go to prison; and afterwards I heard it was because a great nobleman had been speaking about it in Parliament."

"What an honour for you, Dot, to be spoken about before the lords and bishops."

"You forget I am a 'princess,'" was the answer, with the peculiar sweep of her graceful little head and shoulders, which

had no doubt won for her that title. "Afterwards I heard the 'Grubbies' saying, that if they were to be *perrecuted* and sent to prison all along of 'that child,' the sooner they sold her the better. So when Jumper came again and offered a larger sum still, they let me go; and I heard him tell Mrs. Jumper I was worth my weight in gold—so funny, for that was what the dear doctor said. I wonder what they meant, for I am not heavy. I was the lightest of the troupe. Yes,

" 'Stronger than a strip of leather,
Lighter than a *Robin's* feather,' "

sang the little actress, tapping Rex on the shoulder. "That was why the girls hated me; because I could fly higher than them all, and stand on the finest wire.

" 'Yes, to be light is a lovely thing —
Fly in the air with a birdie's wing.
Robin, ask the reason why?
That I, a lark, can fly so high.' "

"Did you learn all that poetry?" asked Rex.
"No, what is there to learn?"

" 'It comes into my little head
When lying on my tiny bed,' "

or, just now, when I am so happy, getting away from Jumper and the bear."

"The other little girls, were they unkind, darling?" said Mrs. Young, caressing her fondly, and looking at the beaming face and eyes sparkling with the delight of freedom, and not surprised that she had excited so much jealousy.

"They were always doing unkind things; and would even get up a hiss when I was being encored, which is considered the most spiteful thing in the 'profession.' I am so glad

Rob, I am not a boy, for I should have to marry a girl, and I don't like girls."

"Then, of course, you don't like yourself?" laughed Rex.

"I think I should have liked to have been this white kitten," sighed Dot, as the pet of the house jumped into her lap. "It has a mother who will never sell it. It is always being petted and loved, and never in any fear of bears and 'Jumpers.'"

"Only 'hoppers,'" laughed Rex, running after Roy, who was going to look at his tricycle.

"Why not paint that red all over with black?" said Rex.

"I think, old man, that is a very wise suggestion of yours, and I mean to change the lamp from red to green. How can I thank you, Rob, my boy, for such a kind thought, and kinder action, for you ran a great risk to get back the machine?"

"I don't want thanks. You are awfully kind to me, so I was determined to get it. I liked the risk, as you call it, and I have saved Dot again."

CHAPTER VII.

THE "VICTORIA."

"IT seems I am not to advertise for Rex," said Sir Roland Radcliffe. "Here are two letters from people who have seen him—the Deacons, who saw him at church last Sunday, and who waited until every one was out, making sure you and I were there. They have heard through the Vincents that the boy had run off; and here is a note from Croft Hall, saying that the gardener met him coming out of the town with a gentleman, whom he thought was a visitor at the Hall. Rex, it seems, pretended not to know him—said that he must be mistaken, that his name was Robert Rover—a statement that was corroborated by this gentleman, who said that was certainly his name, that the man was quite puzzled."

"Little sly dog, to call himself by his second names. He seems quite safe. I dare say he has gone home with some of that party who were there last year, when he was with us. Let us see what the morning's post will bring."

It brought this :

Sept. 1st.

"DEAR SIR,

"I am anxious to inform you that your dear boy is quite safe and well. You, I know, are already aware of his having come to the rescue of a little girl, who was acting with a bear. When I tell you that he has *also saved my*

life—yes, saved it in more senses than one—you will, in some measure, understand that I do not wish to betray him, so long as I can watch over him and protect him. If I find him getting into any mischief or danger, I will instantly wire to you. He has not confided to me the reason of his leaving his home. I only gather it from incidents. He seems possessed with some great purpose, part of which is to rescue suffering children according to the life of his 'General.' His training has evidently not been in vain. I have just been listening to a conversation between him and his little friend, Dot, whom he has saved a second time from the bear, and is now on the lawn beneath my window giving her a Bible lesson, evidently greatly surprised at her want of theological knowledge. Rob, as I call him, never speaks of his family, wishing me to think that he is out in the world on his own hook; but the above incident tells me he has a mother—one out of the common—a mother indeed, and I have seen his father. Asking your forgiveness for this anonymous epistle,

"I remain,

"THE FAITHFUL FRIEND OF YOUR LITTLE BOY"

"Who can he be, I wonder?" remarked Lady Roland. "Somebody nice, I fancy, or he would not write as he does about a mother."

"As I said before, a Croft Hall visitor," said her husband.

"I wish I were with him," sighed Mrs. Desmond. "I do so want to see that poor little Dot."

"Here is a P.S.," said Sir Roland, turning over the page.

"It is right that I should inform you that I did all I possibly could to persuade your boy to return home; but I saw that if I persisted, he might bolt. It was the fear of seeing you that made him leave the hotel and accept

my invitation. Had he not done so, I should have wired. I expect it will depend on the little girl what he does next."

"Tell him to bring Dot here," cried Mrs. Desmond. "Oh, fancy seeing him come in with my own darling," and her eyes filled with happy tears at the very thought. Then she started up. "Let me go and find him out and bring them both home."

"To what quarter of England would you fly?" asked Sir Roland. "Of course this anonymous writer gives no address, like Rex, and only the London post-mark. I quite agree as to what his letter implies, that as he is safe and guarded in a measure, it is better to let him have his fling. A friend was telling me the other day that his son was mad to go to sea, and at last he ran away. All was smooth enough at first, and the lad thought he had done a very clever thing; but very quickly he was overtaken by rough seas and a rougher captain, whose storms never ceased, and he soon became heartily sick of it all in more senses than one. He was found unfit for sea-life, turned giddy directly he tried to go aloft, and was packed off home by a home-bound vessel and arrived like a drowned rat, in a most disconsolate and mortified condition. And that, my love, may be the return of our son and heir," concluded Sir Roland, turning to his wife with a laughing kiss.

"Oh, Roland, how cruel of you to dream such a picture of our Rex. It does comfort me to think that, though he appeared so wild, the Bible lessons have not been lost upon him—dear little chap."

"Yes. You have every comfort in your temporary loss," said Mrs. Desmond. "With me it can only be despair. Even if that Dot is mine, she has been brought up a neglected little heathen."

"Not as bad as that, Nora, dear," replied her friend. "How I wish we could end this suspense for you; but

we can only wait and see what each day unfolds. Perhaps it may be the little cloud, not larger than a man's hand at present, but that is to bring you a shower of blessing sooner than you think."

"If I knew where to go and scour, I would be off at once," said Colonel Desmond.

The object of so much tender solicitude was on the grass, reading out his daily portion to Dot, who was asking if he always read the Bible every day.

"Of course I do, ever since I was born."

"Oh, Rob; you could not have read it when you were a baby."

"Yes, I did," persisted Rex; "at least, I listened to what mother read. She always has the baby down to the Bible readings directly they can understand. She said she wished the very first word that any of us could speak should be 'God.' Our present baby is not quite two, and she sits so still in mother's lap, with her tiny hands folded. At first she only said 'Dod,' and now she can say 'Dod is love;' and the one of three says quite plainly, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me.' It is so pretty to see the other trying to say it after her. Mother says that is having the 'sincere milk of the word;' that we may grow thereby—and we do grow and thrive on it too. I have grown into the Gospels and Psalms. What do you know?"

"Very little," said Dot meekly. "I used to know a lot when I was with granny, but I have forgotten."

"You should have kept them up—said some every day when you say your prayers. I suppose you don't forget them, do you?"

"Sometimes. I'm so dreadfully tired and ache all over when I go to bed, and so sleepy in the morning, that I have to scramble up and they drop out of my head."

"Then the sooner you pick them up again the better," said Rex. "Do you forget to eat your breakfast too?"

"Oh, no! I am so hungry then. I'm often too tired to eat any supper, so I'm starving by morning."

"I'm afraid you are a very naughty little Dot. Mother would say if you can remember your breakfast you could remember your prayers. I wonder you have not been eaten up by that bear ever so often."

"Would not once have been enough, Robin?" asked Dot, with a sober face, though a smile was breaking through at Rex's last words.

"I don't know I'm sure. You must learn not to be so wicked. I will teach you," and Rex, catching sight of Roy with a piece of wood in his hand, on which was some black paint and a long inviting-looking brush, rushed off after him without a word.

Dot's little face was very grave. Was he angry with her?—this wonderful little protector, who seemed to her the embodiment of all that was grand and good. He was her "prince," her brother and sister, all in one, who she could love with all her little heart for the first time since granny's death; and now he had scolded her, called her wicked and naughty, and the large violet eyes were fixed on the grass, filled with tears.

"Dot! Dot! come quick!"

She sprang up and dried her eyes. Not for the world did she want him to see that she was crying. He was waving for her in the distance.

"Have you ever seen that tricycle before?" asked he, pointing to where Roy was standing contemplating his machine.

"No," said Dot.

"You have been on it," remarked Reggie, "and so have I."

"You may have; but the one I was on that was stolen had red wheels and a red lamp. I am sure there is no 'Dumpey' and 'Roy' on that."

"How do you know that was written on it?" laughed Roy. "Did the thieves discover it?"

"No; Rob told me."

"Oh, oh! that is why I heard you say it over and over again? I believe you were muttering it in your sleep, little man."

Then the metamorphoses were explained, and Dot clapped her hands with delight, exclaiming that it would never be recognized again.

Roy took good care that he wore an entirely different suit and hat when he used it, keeping a sharp look-out for suspicious characters.

Dot kept them alive at dinner. She gave them wonderful accounts of the "Haunted House," its mysteries, and its varied inhabitants. At one time she was a baby in her simplicity, at another, a perfect member of the "profession."

Mr. and Mrs. Young sat up talking over the strange circumstance that had landed the winning little stranger at their doors. They had not any child of their own, and the question rose as to whether they should adopt her; but first they must try and find out if her parents were living.

"There's a cut about her not of the common," said Mr. Young.

"Yes, she is lost or stolen, I'll bet my wedding ring," added his wife. "It is enough to look at her tiny ears and ankles. We might advertise her, but there is nothing to take hold of in her appearance. I'll go and talk with the Vicar, Mr. Royston thinks he will advise the best. No doubt he will suggest the Children's Vigilant Committee and the society for the Protection of Children."

In the meantime Rex, being on his way to bed, heard a low sobbing as he passed the little room which had been devoted to Dot. Could that be her crying? Surely not? He tapped and went in.

"Dot, what is the matter? Are you ill? Shall I go for Mrs. Young?"

"Oh, no—no—please don't, there is nothing the matter, I am quite well."

"Then what are you crying for?"

"Nothing."

"I do not believe you are so silly as to cry for nothing. You were jolly enough this evening."

"I was thinking, that is all."

"No, it is not all, Dot. You must tell me directly. I shall not go to bed until you do, so begin."

Dot gave another sob or two.

"I was only thinking how happy you must be with a father and mother, and I have never had any; and I thought you loved me—as I do you—ever so much, for saving me, as you have, from Jumper and the bear. And I thought I was going to be so happy for the first time in my life, and now you do not love me a bit; and——"

"I love you a very great bit—a great hunch," interrupted Rex. "You must have been having a dream."

"I wish it had been only a dream," sobbed Dot. "You called me naughty and wicked to-day, and you would not have done that if you loved me."

"My father and mother would have called me worse names than that, if I had forgotten to say my prayers and read my Bible. I should have been punished, I can tell you. It was not because I was angry with you, but because I love you so very much, Dottie, dear, that I spoke as I did, for I want you to love God, who loves you far more than I do," said Rex, calling to mind the words that had often been said to him by both mother and father. Then he kissed her. "Dottie, dear, never think that I do not love you. Did you say your prayers to-night?"

"Yes, I said 'Glory be to the Father,' and 'Pity mice and plicity.'"

"What ever does all that mean?" asked Rex, half inclined to laugh. "What's that about 'mice'?"

"Don't you know? It begins,

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity mine and pity——"

I never knew what it meant, but I have always said it."

"I never say what I don't understand. You ought to say,

'Pity my simplicity.'

You have jumbled the words altogether and made a great hash. I will teach you the one I used to say, and that my little sisters say:

"Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless thy little lamb to-night;
Through the darkness be Thou near me—
Keep me safe till morning light."

"That's lovely!" cried Dot.

"You shall learn a little bit at a time," said Rex.

Rex felt a great lump in his throat at the last verse; but he tried to swallow it down, and was very glad it was dark, for great tears were in his eyes. Such a lovely home-picture rose before him. Three little figures, with fair curly hair, kneeling before a loving mother, in a beautiful room of bright pictures and birds, and which the golden sunset was making still brighter. There was a far-off look in that mother's face. Was she thinking of him?

"I never heard anything more lovely!" said Dot. "I shall learn it off quite quickly, like my poetry I had to learn for my part at the Crystal Palace."

Next morning, when Rex was learning his daily verse he gave one to Dot and the first verse of the hymn; but

just as she was going to say it, Roy called them to come to his room, where they found him opening a wooden case.

"Guess, children, what is here?"

"Books!" said Rex.

"Is it something alive?" asked Dot. "Jumper had a monkey sent to him like that, only there were holes all round. He had to dance to my violin, and one night he snatched it out of my hand and ran all round the ring with it, and the people clapped and roared with laughter; but he nearly broke my finger and sprained my wrist, and then Jumper shook me because I said I could not play any more, and they encored. I wonder, if they had had a sprained wrist, if they would like to be encored? But the audience never see through things. The master will crack his whip and say something funny and crack again, and there would be shouts of laughter; but we knew that certain cracks meant swearing at us for something we had done, or had not done. Many a child has cried at the thought of what to-morrow's rehearsal would bring. And then the Boss would say something funny, and pretend to tap her playfully; but he would be whispering, 'Be quiet, you little fool, laugh directly, and go on.'"

"It is a ship! It's a steamer!" cried Rex. "How jolly!"

"Oh! how lovely!" cried Dot. "That's better than a monkey. It won't scratch and snatch and bite."

"Have you bought that as a present for somebody?" asked Rex.

"No. It has come for me."

"For you?" laughed the children; "as if you, a great tall man, were going to play with that."

"I am going to play with her first, and then I intend sailing in her to the Pacific Islands," was Roy's answer to the astonished children.

Rex fixed his large eyes on him to discover the drift of his meaning.

"Then you will want a fairy to tap it with a wand, and turn it into a great big ship."

"It is called the '*Victoria*!'" cried Rex. "Roy—look, here it is on the stern."

"It is a first-rate little model," said Roy. "Would you not like to see the great reality now in the docks?"

"Has it a reality?" cried Rex. "Oh, Roy, can't I see it?"

"That is just what I'm thinking about. I'll try and manage it. Have you ever been to the docks?"

"No—never. I have been promised, but it has never got farther than that."

"Well, I will try and keep my promise; but I have to draw this first, take notes and measurements, with all its details and contingencies, and then some day I will take you with me to the Victoria Docks."

"Jolly! Hurrah!" cried Rex.

"May I go too?" asked Dot.

"No, it is not the place for a little girl. I am very sorry," said Roy.

"Never mind," said Rex, "I will tell you all about it. You might get hurt, or killed, or something. It is an awful place, those docks. My sister was not to go. It is only a place for men."

"You are not a man."

"No; but I shall be. Are you really going right away to the Pacific Ocean, amongst all those jolly little islands? Can't you take me?"

"Not exactly," laughed Roy.

"But I can pay my own passage. Of course, it would take gold?"

"Rather," was the reply. "Suppose you write to your father?" said Roy, hoping by that means to get him safe home before his departure.

Rex did not answer.

"Take us both," cried Dot; "I have never been on the sea."

"Yes; take us both. That would be awfully jolly, Dot. You could get the captain, Roy, to land us on one of the little islands, while you go on to the big ones, and then you can fetch us. Think, Dot, what a fine time we will have. We will act 'Robinson Crusoe,' and eat oranges and coconuts."

"Yes," added Dot, "and get hold of a pumpkin, and I will wave my wand over it and it shall turn into a carriage, and we will drive round the islands, for we can perhaps find a little boat just to sail about. How happy we should be!" and the two children danced round and round the little model in an ecstasy of delight at their own inventions, *little thinking*; and they examined every hole and corner, until they longed to see the grand mother of the little vessel, waiting her finishing touches in the docks, ere she launched forth into the sea of life, *little thinking—little thinking!*

And Roy spread sheets of paper on the table and prepared his note book, and took out his compasses from time to time, glancing at the boy and girl before him, so lovely, so handsome, hoping that the fairy form of one would be nestled up in a mother's love, and determined to let Sir Roland fetch his boy when the day was fixed for his sailing—*little thinking! little dreaming!*

The above was the outcome of a long talk the week before between the heads of the firm of ship-owners to whom Roy had written important letters, and which we saw him tear up that first memorable day.

"I am delighted to see such a change in him," said one gentleman, after Roy had left the office, whither he had been summoned by a telegram before his holiday was over.

"So am I," said another. "I was afraid that terrible affair concerning his father would have a serious effect on him, he evidently took it deeply to heart; it was, I could see,

telling on his health. He imagined it had got wind in the house, and I am pretty sure it never did. I am glad you suggested his going out in the *Victoria*, the voyage will do him good—blow the cobwebs away. We need someone with all his wits about him. Royston has splendid abilities, and, with his appearance, will be sure to make his way. He will represent us better than any in the office, and will sure to be liked wherever he goes."

* * * * *

"Are you asleep, Dot?" said Rex softly, the night after the model appeared.

"No, I am wide awake."

"You were just going to say your hymn to me when Roy called us. Would you like to say it now? I suppose it was only a line or two, and you have forgotten it by this time?"

"No, I have not," said Dot, and to his surprise, she went steadily through the first verse in her low musical voice. "I am glad you gave it me, Rob. It is lovely!" and, to his amazement, she began the other verse, and right on to the end of the hymn.

"Dot, you must surely have learnt that before?"

"Never even heard it; but I read each a great many times, so it all remained in my head, and I could not help knowing it. What shall I learn next?"

"What I am learning, if you like—about Satan going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

"Oh, Robin! how dreadful! That can never be in the Bible. Do not give me anything so frightful all in the dark."

"He is just as near to us in the day," said Rex, by way of consolation, "and we must fight him."

"But I can't," cried Dot piteously.

"No, of course you can't; so God has sent a greater

'Lion' to fight him, and trample on him, and conquer instead of you ; and——"

'Oh, Rob, please don't. If you had had a bear always after you, you would not want lions."

"I do not want it, Dot, but they are there. You do not understand. We must be glad, for the grand, strong lion is Jesus—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah !"

"Oh, Robin, do not be so wicked as to call the loving Jesus of my hymn a lion. He is called the 'tender Shepherd,' and I felt I could be one of His lambs and love Him." And there was a great quiver and a half-sob in the little voice, in its yearning longing for a resting love.

"No, it is not wicked, it is in the Bible. Of course 'foricallly' speaking."

"Whatever's that, Rob ?"

"I wonder how you will understand," said Rex, slowly trying to remember his mother's explanation. "Well, you know, 'the Shepherd' means His watchful tender care ; and then, in the Old Testament, He is called a 'Lion' because of His strength. But Satan is called a 'lion' on account of his strength in killing ; he only prowls about to destroy. If we pray, God sends the other 'Lion' ; or, if you like it better, Jesus stands between as a shield, and no harm can come near us. Try and always think of that, Dot, and then you won't be so afraid of that bear."

"Is that why you were not frightened, Rob, and are so brave ?"

"I was not brave, I was frightered," replied Rex honestly, "until I suddenly thought of David—how he said he was not alarmed at the Philistine, because God had delivered him out of the paws of a lion and a bear, and that thought gave me courage. And, you see, He did save us both, and I thanked Him. Did you, dear ?"

"No ; I am afraid I didn't," said Dot sorrowfully. "I wish I knew your prayer ; it must be very clever, and fits in for everything."

"I have no particular prayer," replied Rex. "Mine are generally *extempory*."

"Whatever's that?" cried Dot, sitting up in bed, better to comprehend the unknown word.

"It means just out of my head, as things turn up. Father and mother say they want us to go to God just as simply as we do to them for everything. When we have done anything wrong, we have to tell them and say we are sorry; or, if we have broken anything, to go with it at once to them. If we hide it we're punished, and so at night, mother makes us think over the day, and how we have been naughty or quarrelled and lots of things, and tell God about it, and ask Him to forgive us for Jesus' sake. And then, of course, there are always lots of things to thank about—being kept alive and well, and no accident happening indoors or out. You do that, Dot, and you will grow into it as I am doing."

"Yes," said Dot. "I'll begin to-night."

"Did you see that queer-looking bathing machine down the road yesterday?" asked Rex of Dot, next morning, when we were going up into the wood with Roy?"

"No, I never saw it. How could it be a bathing machine? There is not any sea near here, is there?"

"No; it's miles off; but the queer thing looked just like it—a little house, with windows in it. We will go and look at it. It is standing back in a field; but I must learn my verse first. I am picking out all the lions of the Bible—hunting them up. You come and say yours."

"Not about lions, Rob. How dreadfully fond you are of wild beasts."

"So will you be some day in the 'lennium.' You will lead a lion about and feed him with straw."

"Am I to walk about with a lion?" cried Dot, with a terrified look. "When? How? Where? Oh, Rob, I believe Mr. and Mrs. Young are going to sell me to a lion-tamer!"

And not heeding Rex's assurance that it had nothing to do with her present protectors, and that it was in the Bible, she rushed round the house to a large field, where Mr. Young and his wife were contemplating the finishing touches to a large haystack, when looking round, they saw Dot flying towards them with a frightened look which made them fear that her tormentors had tracked her, and were somewhat relieved when between panting and sobbing she asked if they were going to sell her to a lion-tamer.

"Sell you! my dear little girl," said the farmer, taking her up in his arms, and depositing her on a high mound of hay. "No, not for a thousand pounds. What has put such a thought into your head?"

"Rob has got lions on the brain, as Jumper would say, and he has just told me that I am to walk about with a lion and tiger."

"No, only a lion," said Rex, who had run after her, "and you can play with the bear and cow together in those days. I was only telling her about the lions in the Bible," added he in explanation, "and she got muddled."

"Keep to the lambs, dear," said Mrs. Young, "tell her about them. She shall never go near any of those wild animals again, as long as we have a roof over our heads. I wonder it has not been too much for her long ago—my bonnie wee girlie."

"Rob! Rob!" called Roy from over the hedge. "I'm off to the docks, so come along."

Rex required no second bidding. Kissing Dot, with the promise to tell her every bit of what he had seen, he had vanished, and the two were soon on their way to the train, Rex's delight knowing no bounds. His pleasure would have been somewhat damped had he seen a pair of fierce-looking eyes watching him from the inn door.

"That's only one of 'em," said the man to another. One is no good without t'other. I means to have both."

For the first part of the journey Rex kept a watchful eye in every direction, especially at the stations, fearing suddenly to see the apparition of his father, and gave one or two starts when their carriage suddenly opened and a gentleman sprang in. He knew Roy lived down a branch line, but did not know where on it joined the main line, and he was not quite easy until they reached New Cross, and then changed eastward, finally taking a steamer to the Victoria Docks. His excitement was extreme—what glorious confusion—what variation of sounds—what melodious bells—the narrow escape of collisions. What a grand forest of ships, each with its own individual history. Was it a mile long, these wonderful docks? Nine miles. Rex was astounded. What opportunities for saving life. No wonder his "General" never went to school. What boy of spirit and pluck would be poring over Latin and Greek, studying the history of dead kings, or amusing themselves with cricket, kicking each other to death with football, while such a glorious field lay open? Instead of learning about places on a map, why not go and see them? A multitude of these thoughts were rushing through the practical little brain. As to Roy's vessel, he had never imagined anything so grand and extensive. While his friend was engaged in business he had gone over her from stem to stern. Then his friend showed him over, and explained and answered his many questions. There was a sailor on board, a fine middle-aged man, called by his mates "Fag," on account of his readiness to give a helping hand wherever it was needed. Rex seeing that he looked kind, asked him some questions that were so readily answered; it led to more, with a splendid supplement of sea anecdotes, that made the boy's mouth water to inhale real salt sea-breezes, with its attendant sights and adventures.

"Ah! young master; if you had lived fifty years ago you would soon have had enough of wild adventures. It's all as different now as this vessel to-day, as you see it in the

rough, and a few weeks hence when she sails all trimmed and ready."

"Why, won't she have adventures?" asked Rex, somewhat disappointed.

"She may run foul of a steamer before she's been a day in the Channel, and meet with no end of disasters in the fog and out of it; but not the same sort as in bygone times, when every part of the world was not known as it is now—the varied coasts and islands accurately surveyed. There might often be a leak in many a chart. Now it's corrected up to the latest date. Most of the old unseaworthy craft is broken up or disposed of somehow, so one may hope in these days, with such a fine fleet of merchant ships, to get safely through any voyage he may start upon."

"Were you ever shipwrecked?"

"Yes, several times. I've been in such danger, that I thought every moment would be my last."

"And did your ship go down?" asked Rex eagerly.

"Yes. It's a long story, and I was safe on another when the brig went down. She drifted into the dreaded rocks in the course of the night—one of the darkest I ever remember.

"The storm came on thicker and faster,
And black, just as pitch, was the sky,
When truly a doleful disaster
Befell my poor shipmates and I."

"How I should like to have seen that.

"You would not like to have been on her, young master."

"No," said Rex considering, "not if there were no lives to save. It must be a grand thing to save a life at sea."

"Ah, my boy, it's a sad thing to see a mate drowning and not be able to throw out a rope. I've heard many an

awful sound, and seen many a terrible sight—been within a few yards of a whirlpool—stood close to the cannon's mouth, and been three days on a volcanic mountain in course of eruption, not able to get off the island ; but none of 'em ever so thrilled to my very bones as that one cry of two words ringing out from stem to stern, 'Man overboard.'

"Have you ever saved a life?" enquired Rex, looking into his face with great eagerness.

"Aye, aye, lad, many, thank God," returned the "Fag," answering the look with a beaming face—"Life is not worth living if it never tries to save."

"No," replied his little listener, "I don't think it is."

"If you are coming this voyage," said the old seaman, "I'll spin you many a long yarn of how I came to do it. It will make your hair stand on end ; but I suppose you are not coming with that gentleman?"

"No," said Rex, in a hesitating manner. "I should like to come though. I might save a life. I might win the Victoria Cross, and——"

"And you might be drowned, or swallowed down like a pill by a shark, or whale," interrupted the sailor with a laugh. "It's not easy, as you may think, to save a life at sea. It's not difficult to fish a man up here in dock, as you perhaps saw that boy yonder on the *Vulcan*, he was over from the rigging ; but it's another matter to catch hold of him in a roaring sea, a storm raging with the utmost fury, and the vessel going at ten knots. I think you would soon wish yourself snug in bed at school, young gentleman."

"I am not going to school," replied Rex, with the quick drill movement of his shoulders and head erect. "I should not be at all surprised if I took a passage out to the Pacific. I have not decided."

"So it's you that's going to decide, is it?" said Fag, with a hearty laugh.



"HAVE YOU EVER SAVED A LIFE?" ENQUIRED REX.

"Yes. No, not exactly. I'm waiting orders from my 'General.' All right, Roy, I'm coming. Good-bye, dare say you will see me again, and you'll tell me some of your jolly tales," and shaking hands with the sailor, with many nods, Rex darted to the upper deck in answer to the repeated calls of Roy, who was getting anxious about him.

"I wonder who that youngster is?" said the sailor to himself, as he watched the agile movements of the boy. "Might be the son of an admiral, only he talked about the 'General.' Whoever he is, he'll make his mark along the line, I'll bet my old pipe he will—on land or sea."

Roy had a little time to spare, as they were to return by train; so he remained at the docks up to the last five minutes. A boy, looking very ragged, held out some small note-books with a very piteous expression. Rex dived into his pocket and presented him with a penny, for which a crimson-covered one was tendered in exchange.

"No, I don't want your books," said Rex. "I thought you looked hungry, and would like a bun."

"I will have a book," said Roy, pitching a sixpence to him, but you need not give me the change," and presently, when they were in the train, he threw the book into Rex's lap. "I saw you writing on an old envelope. Won't that be better?"

"Thanks, that's jolly. I'm making notes to tell Dot about everything and everywhere."

Poor Roy, how bitterly he regretted that little gift.

Rex opened it at once and transferred every stopping place and what happened thereat in the most business-like manner, and it was all fully and graphically detailed at tea; and then Roy took out the model of the *Victoria*, and made Rex's account still more interesting and real.

"How I would like to go on it. Fancy it being higher than this house," said Dot.

"Perhaps I might manage to take you both the day of the launch," said Roy; "but do not count upon it."

Dot, however, began to count from that moment.

"Have you ever been on the sea, Mr. Royston?"

"Yes, very often."

"But I mean to be days and days at sea."

"Yes, I have been to India," said Roy, a dark shadow stealing over his face, and a look of pain in his large hazel eyes.

"Did you meet tigers, and hear jackalls at night, howling at your door?" asked Rex.

"Oh, Robin, please, not wild beasts. Something about monkeys and the cocoa-nuts."

"I think I saw something much prettier than a monkey—a dear little girl—a princess about three years older than you, and what do you think, she was married."

"Married!" "Married!" cried the children together.

"Yes."

"And was her husband a little boy?"

"No, he was grown up, though very young."

"Oh; how funny," said Dot. "I should like to have seen her. Is that the little princess?" cried Dot, rushing across the room where, in the corner, was a picture that seemed to represent the marriage ceremony of a boy and girl.

"No, that is not the Indian Princess, but a Princess of Scotland, who was married to the Dauphin when a child. She did not go over to France until she was older, but the marriage of the children was equally binding, though seas and politics divided them."

Long after Dot had gone to bed, Rex remained buried in his "General," then he took his Bible, searched something out and returned to him.

Dot was just going to sleep, thinking that Rex had forgotten to come and say his verse and hear hers, when his quick step, quicker tap, and quickest entrance, told her she was mistaken.

"Are you awake, Dot?"

"I was just going to sleep, thinking you had forgotten, and

I was so hoping I should dream that I was the little Scotch Princess, and that you were the Dauphin, whatever that means. Then we should be married and happy ever after like Cinderella—never to be divided no more. Mr. Young is very kind and so is Mrs. Young, and they said they should like to have me for their own little girl until I found my real mother. That they would 'dopt me as their very own; but would they 'dopt you too, Rob?"

"I do not want to be adopted," replied Rex quickly. "I have adopted myself. Somebody might want me without you, or want you without me, so I have been thinking over it, and I have come in to make your dream true before you have dreamt it. I will be the Dauphin, the Prince, you know, and you shall be the little Scotch Princess. We will be married, and then not anybody can separate us."

"Do you really mean it?" cried Dot, starting up in bed. "You only mean it for fun, just to act."

"No, I mean it to be a real act. 'It is the only way I can protect you,' as the 'General' said to the young lady, who was all alone in some foreign land, and so he married her and they were very happy. He says, 'A man can't marry too young, provided he can keep a wife.'"

"Can you, Robin?"

"I have not much just now—a little gold—to begin with."

"Gold! Gold! Why we can live beautifully on that!" cried the little bride-elect, with all the money-before-love wisdom of this end of the nineteenth century.

"I shall have lots of money by-and-bye," said Rex, when I have won the 'Victoria Cross.'"

"Is that a game or a race?" asked Dot, and she was not very much the wiser for the explanation.

"I can win a lot of money. I'll go off at once, but not to Bruin. I knew a kind manager who wanted me to drive a car drawn by poodles, it would be fun."

"You are not to do anything of the kind, Dot. Poodles in front and a tiger behind."

"No, only poodles—white, fluffy, dear poodles, with a monkey on the first as an outrider. I don't mind," continued the little actress, clasping her tiny hands.

"Nobody to love me,
Nobody to care;
It matters not
What I do, or dare."

"It matters a great deal what you do, Miss Dot. You say you are a lady; if you were not I should not marry you, for I am a gentleman. And you are never to sing that again about 'Nobody to love you,' when I love you ever so much. People don't marry each other unless they like each other ever such a lot."

"Do they indeed?" said Dot meditatively. "Well, I only know that Mrs. Jumper married Jumper out of revenge. I heard her say it lots of times, and he went tit for tat, and said he only married her for her 'tin.' And her brother married the widow of the 'Pig and Whistle' only because he wanted to be landlord of the 'Pig.' What are you laughing at, Rob? You will not be like that, I know. You are like the grand prince in 'Cinderella' who only marries for love, and I'll sing,

"Somebody to love me,
Somebody to care;
It matters now
What I do and dare."

"I think I'm much more like 'This is the house that Jack built,'" laughed Rex, "'Who married the maid all forlorn.'"

"Not for money, but for 'lorn!' What's that, Rob?"
But Roy called at that moment, and Rex disappeared.

"Rob, just hold the other end of this measuring line, will you? I'm in a bit of a fix," said the young man, standing with one end grasped in his left hand and his note-book and pen in the other. He had some deep calculations to sum up. No fear of Rex interrupting with his queer questions as he expected, the boy was solving a problem of his own—his matrimonial project, which appeared as complicated as making his Will. He, however, went round and round the table according to the directions of the long tape, as it slipped from stem to stern of the *Victoria*, which was standing in all her grandeur before Roy. "I cannot make out this space," said he, comparing notes.

"Did you go into the doctor's cabin?"

"I think you took me. I'm not sure; but I know I saw an awfully jolly cabin, with shelves and tins all fixed, so as to swing which ever way the ship rolled. I remember it, for behind was the most splendid place for hide-and-seek. I wished Dot was there to play, all in and out, zig-zag. You thought you had come to the end, and then came another queer nook."

"I thought if such a place existed your sharp eyes would have ferretted it out," laughed Roy. "This must be the one I mean—just do for soft cargo, and the doctor's private store. Glad I called you, old man."

Another silence.

"Rob, you will make a capital man of business by-and-bye. You are going round and round the table with this measuring line like a blind donkey at a mill, without asking the 'whys' and 'wherefores.'"

"The 'General' puts that down in his articles of war. 'Learn to do a thing in simple obedience, without asking any questions. It must be the groundwork of military tactics.'"

"Well, you may ask any question you like during the next five minutes," said Roy, "for I am not counting."

"Rex's eyes were fixed on the small picture of the marriage of Margaret of Scotland.

"Where is that marriage over there taking place? It does not look like a church."

Roy expected a volley of nautical questions, certainly not the one asked.

"I do not know. More likely the Palace, Holyrood. It is only a room, I fancy, represented."

"Perhaps it was a registry office?" suggested Rex. "Some people are married there."

"Not in those days, and no need to do that in Scotland. Even a clergyman was not needed. The two could bind themselves to each other over the Bible with a ring." Roy was overtaken with a difficulty, and began to count again.

"Would you like to be married there?" asked Rex, presently.

"Where is *there*?" asked Roy, "Holyrood?"

"No, the registry office."

"Can't say I should," replied Roy, making a face. "Do you intend to go in for that in days to come?"

"Nurse's sister did, and she said the binding was as firm and tight as leather; and nurse got waxy and said, 'Tuts, child, only firm as crochet cotton—can be snapped at any moment.'"

"They were both wrong and both right," said Roy. "It is legal and binding; but marriage is a sacred thing, and I should like mine to be in a church, where God could be asked to bless it. Here, catch hold of that measuring-line again, and carry it up from the gangway to the bridge," and Roy began counting vigorously.

CHAPTER VIII.

REX'S OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

"WHY, goodness me, what an extraordinary thing!"

Mrs. Young was arranging Dot's hair, not at all admiring the peculiar style of a small piece, plaited and fastened on the top of her head, detracting from the graceful folds of the long cataract of golden floss. As she unfastened the small coil, a very short lock of white hair like silver was curled up underneath, which gave rise to the above exclamation.

"Oh! I guess you have touched the spring, and the 'fatal secret' is out!" cried Dot. "That's what Jumper used to say. Oh, look at Rob, jumping round me like the dancing bear. I feel like a *prima donna*, the centre of attraction!" and the little actress bowed gracefully to Mr. Young, his wife, and Roy, who had gathered round.

"Why, she carries the clue to being restored to her parents. That stamps her identity," cried Mr. Young and Roy in a breath.

"Yes," said Dot, "that is my 'dentity.' All my mothers and fathers have been afraid of this dear little lock of hair," added she, laughing. "It has been cut off over and over again. I wonder where it would have reached to by this time?" and she looked down quizzically. "Perhaps I should have walked on it like the Skye terrier, who used to

dance to my violin. All his hair was white satin like mine.

" 'Little they thought what a pair we were,
Both with our lovely silver hair,' "

warbled Dot; then in a changed tone. "Even I didn't know it till lately—about a year—just by accident. Directly it grew it was cut off that I should never see it; but when I did, they made me promise never to tell nobody, and that the most awful things would be done to me if I did, and my hair was done up as you saw it, in case it should be forgotten to be cut, and the last few weeks Mrs. Jumper has been ill and so it has been forgotten, and I have kept my promise. I did not tell even you, did I, dear Mrs. Young?" concluded Dot, looking sweetly up at her. "You discovered the 'fatal secret' all by yourself; but you won't give me up, will you?" and the whole of her expression changed to one of grief and sudden fear. "If this proves my 'dentity,' pray do not give me up. I don't want any more mothers and fathers, who may only turn into wild-beast tamers, or conjurors, or the keeper of a children's troop, even though the 'vigilant' watch them. Oh! it's awful!"

With broken sobs she knelt with clasped hands at the feet of Mrs. Young. Her husband caught her up, and placing her in his wife's arms, said, in a moved voice,

"You stay there, little one. You shall not be given up to anybody, not even to those who have a right to you, unless they know how to take care of the children God has given them."

Rex had not spoken. His lips were compressed, and his face pale with very determined lines over them, and at the little one's grief, his eyes grew very dark. He just took hold of Dot's hand and whispered,

"It's all right. You shan't be given up. I'll protect you."

The whisper was very husky, and then he rushed from the room. She did not catch all the words, and wished he had spoken louder.

"Would you like to go after Rob, dearie?" said Mrs. Young, after a silence of some minutes, which she spent in pressing Dot to her heart with fond kisses and smiles. "Go and have a game together."

"That's right, wife, it was better to let her go, her great blue eyes were fixed on the door, blinking now and then, just as a dog watches for the return of his master. It's quite pretty to see how fond those two children are of one another."

"Rob, with all his tricks and daring, is as tender with her as a girl with her doll," said Roy. They will feel the separation that's coming; but I was glad to hear what you said, Young, about not giving her up to just anybody, for I dare say your first thought was like mine—advertise her with the white lock of hair, and she would be claimed before the day was done."

"Yes, claimed by some drinking thief perhaps, who only wants to sell her, body and soul. I'll see myself in prison first," said the farmer, stamping his foot. "I'm ready to tear my hair out by the roots when I read of those cases of Dr. Barnardo, and hear of him insulted and condemned because he won't let a cruel wretch kill his or her child. If ever a man is faithfully doing the Lord's work, it is that doctor, and it would be all the better for the world if more of them wild medical students followed in his wake. Do you mean to say I am to see a drunken father *beat his child with a red-hot poker*, and not take the poor little victim from his clutches?"

"Of course you should, husband dear," said Mrs. Young; "but do not work yourself up to fever heat. Neither Mr.

Royston or I have been using red-hot pokers, so go and wreak your energy on the wicked culprits instead."

"I quite agree with your husband, Mrs. Young," said Roy, with one of his gravest smiles. "I do not wonder at his vehemence if he has seen half what I have down the East End, near the Docks, where children are bought and sold like herrings, or hired for the day or week, and starved to create pity. I would do much, had I time, before sailing, could I only land poor little Dot into the safe keeping of a really loving mother. I fancy, if alive, she must be of gentle birth, there is such a refined cut about the child."

Roy little dreamt how much he had done towards that recovery.

Dot, in the meantime, had found Rex, but not without having a good hunt, and discovered him on a grassy bank behind the beehive. He was lying full-length on the slope, with his Testament and "General" open before him. At the sound of her voice he shielded his face with his hands, and seemed buried in his book.

"Rob, do you think they mean to advertise me and let my white lock prove my 'dentity?'"

"They would only do it out of kindness to you if they did," said Rex, "but I don't think they mean to do anything yet," he hastened to add, as he remarked the same look of fear coming over her face.

"Don't let them take me from you. Oh, Robin!"

Rex sprang up and put his arm round her, drawing her down beside him.

"Dottie, darling, don't cry, you make me so miserable. They shall not separate us. We will be married this morning if there is time, if not, to-morrow; then, as the 'General' said, 'I can take you under my protection.' You will be my property, and not anyone shall steal you away. I love you awfully, Dot—even more than my sister—and I will work for you, and make you ever so happy. I have been asking

my 'General' to tell me what I am to do, and he says something about marriage being a serious thing—not to be made fun of, you know, Dot; and that, although it is quite legal at an office, there can be no real blessing on it except God joins the hands, and so we will first go to the registry office and do the legal part, and then we will go into the church and ask God to join our hands. That will be better than any clergyman, won't it, Dot?"

"Yes," said Dot, with a look of awe over her face.

"Of course we must wait until we are grown up, and I have a fine house and servants, then, if it is necessary, we will be married over again in style. You shall have a white satin dress with a train three yards long like my aunt's and like my mother wears at the Drawing Room, and you shall have pages."

"Like in 'Cinderella?'" interrupted Dot, "and will you marry me as the prince did?"

"No, I shall not," said Rex. "He only married Cinderella because the shoe fitted. I marry you because I love you. Let me finish, Dot. Your *trousseau*——"

"My what?" said the bride-elect, opening her eyes.

"*Trousseau*. It means all the things a bride gets to wear. I know the name well; was tired of hearing it every day for months before Aunt Lucy was married. She had things enough to fill a bazaar, mother said, and that half of them were only for show, because people came to look at them. You shall have some very pretty things, just what you really want."

"How lovely!" cried Dot. "I hope our marriage will not be legal, that we can have it all over again."

"We will get ready to-day. I must go over the marriage-service with you, Dot, so that you may understand the little bits we will say. They are quite easy; but it would not be right to be talking over it and asking questions at the altar."

"We are not M. and N.," remarked Dot, looking over his shoulder on to the open prayer book.

"No, that means anybody. You must be your own bridesmaid, and we shall give ourselves away."

"With this ring I thee wed," read Dot.

"You don't say that. I do," interrupted Rex. "That reminds me I must buy you a wedding-ring."

"I dare say there are some at the toy shop at the end of the village."

"Toy shop!" repeated Rex contemptuously. "I shall go to the jeweller's, if there is one here. Let us go and see."

"There is one not far from the toy shop," said Dot, "next to the chemist's with the red and blue lights."

After a little more talk over the prayer book, they started off to the village, until they arrived at the jeweller's, with a tempting tray of various rings in his window.

"They are there—look!" cried Dot.

"£1 15s. 0d., £1 10s. 0d., £2 0s. 0d.," read Rex.

"That cannot be for those bits of gold, quite plain. The tickets must mean for those emerald and ruby rings. Let us go in and ask."

"What is the price of those rings?" enquired Rex. "I should like to look at them, please."

The owner of the shop and the rings moved rather slowly to take them out of the window, watching his young customers all the time.

"Those are only wedding-rings," suggested he, as Rex took one up in his hand.

"Yes, I know," was the reply, as he proceeded to try it on to Dot, to the man's surprise and amusement.

"Have you been asked to buy a wedding-ring?" asked he.

"Not exactly," hesitated Rex; "but I wish for one. What is the price? £2 2s. for only this quite plain gold one?"

"Yes; but it is thick. Here is a much finer one at a guinea."

"Come to the toy shop," whispered Dot.

Rex gave her a look and a nudge; but the man had overheard.

"Yes, young gentleman, that would be much better, for these are not playthings."

"I do not want toys," replied Rex, with a flush and erect head; "but this guinea one is too large for this young lady. I must go elsewhere. Good-morning."

"Rob, you must not get a gold ring; remember my finger will get much larger. Why, only a year ago I had a new one, with green stones in it, when I was 'princess' in the 'enchanted castle,' and I can't wear it now."

"No. I see. I forgot that. I only thought how nice it would be to put the ring on your finger and never take it off again."

"Never mind," said Dot, "you shall buy a beauty when we have our grand marriage, if this is not legal, as you call it."

"And so, to his disappointment, he had to put up with a toy ring. Certainly it was a marvellous imitation.

"It really might be mistaken for pure gold," said the woman at the shop, "and some day, little missy, perhaps you will want a real wedding-ring."

Dot would have said she wanted it now, but had been cautioned by Rex to secrecy, and they left the shop.

"Yes," said she, "we are acting the story of the 'Secret Marriage,' it's lovely."

"We are not acting at all, Dot," said Rex, "it is a great reality, as my 'General' says. Do you think I would go into a church to act?"

"No, of course not," replied Dot gravely, "that would be very wicked, specially when God joins our hands, it makes it so awfully solemn."

The children did not speak for some moments. Just as they were leaving the village an idea struck Rex.

"Dot, I have forgotten something. Will you go to the grocer's and buy some rice, and wait for me outside?"

"Are you going to make a rice pudding?" asked she, with a very wry face. "I have had to make and to eat so many all my life. I hate them."

"So do I," said Rex, with a memory of nursery dinners. "No, nothing so vulgar; but, you know, they always have rice at weddings, so we will have as much fun afterwards as we can."

Rex saw her safe in at the grocer's, then returned to the toy shop and bought Dot a pretty little locket. He would have preferred the jeweller's, but was rather shy of going in there again. Then he saw her standing where he told her.

"They asked me if it were for soup or puddings," laughed she, holding up a small packet of rice. "I told them any would do. They have some dear little cakes, Rob, all covered with white sugar. May I buy one? We ought to have a wedding-cake."

So they went back into the grocer's and bought the frosted cake for threepence, and some grapes for their *déjeuner*, which Dot insisted upon paying for out of her winnings that first memorable day of their acquaintance.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WEDDING DAY.

IT was a brilliant sunny day at Briarwood. Rex and Dot were up early. She was busy trimming her hat with white roses, and he was making a bouquet on the other side of the house; and then he brought it to Dot with the locket, just as he had seen the bridegroom do the morning of his aunt's wedding, who was certainly not more delighted with her expensive hothouse bouquet and locket set in brilliants than was Dot with the simple white garden flowers, and the toy representation of a locket, and she put a lovely rose into his coat as they kissed each other.

Mr. and Mrs. Young and Roy always remembered how lovely Dot looked that morning. She had taken particular pains with her hair, and it hung over her shoulders in a silky cataract, and Rex, so handsome with his thoughtful expressive eyes, now and then dancing with fun, or sparkling with a secret intelligence, as he bestowed upon her little attentions with all the deference of a young cavalier.

It was about mid-day when they entered the train to take them to the nearest town, for Rex found out that there was not any registry office at Briarwood. But at two stations off was Motley, where was a small office. Two young men were amusing themselves in various ways, as not anything particular was going on. They were supposed to be very

busy copying out old entries into a new book, but as their principal had gone up to town, the large books were certainly on the desks ; but there were two far more entertaining ones, with yellow backs, exciting pictures and title, which were engaging the most of their attention ; so much so, that they did not hear the tap at the glass door until it was repeated in a louder key.

"Bother ! Come in !"

"It is only two children !"

"Is this the registry office ?"

"Yes. What's your message ?"

"Is this where you marry people ?"

"Yes. Very important business is transacted here, and so it is not a playground for children."

"We have not come here to play," said Rex, drawing himself up. "We have come on important business. We wish to be married."

"Don't come larking in here," said the other young man, without looking up, "go round to the sweet shop, and amuse yourselves, not in here."

"We are not larking," said Dot gravely. "We are not so wicked ; for if marriages are performed here it must be a sacred place."

"Yes," added Rex, "marriage is a solemn thing, however young the parties are, and should not be undertaken lightly."

The young man looked up hastily from his book, exchanged a rapid meaning glance with his companion, and a much longer and astonished one at the two children. He then went behind a high desk and beckoned his companion. They spoke together for a few minutes, finally saying, "It will be a jolly spree, do you think you can keep your countenance ? I think I had better tie the knot."

Then they came forward with serious faces.

"We are not in the habit of uniting such a youthful couple,

but as you both seem to understand its gravity, and that marriage is not a game, though it is a lottery, we are willing to make you an exception. We conclude that you have had your names posted up for three weeks?"

"Our names on the posters, or do you mean carried about by the sandwich men?" replied Rex, somewhat indignantly. "No, indeed, we have not done anything of the kind, it surely cannot be necessary."

"Perhaps your banns have been asked in church?"

"No."

"Well, do you purpose having a special license?"

"I thought it was quite easy to be married at a registry office," said Rex, somewhat bewildered.

"Perhaps it would be quite easy at another," suggested Dot in a stage whisper.

"No, young lady, I can assure you, that you might go to a hundred and find it far more difficult; in fact, you might not be married at all. I am quite willing to marry you without all these preliminaries. I suppose you have brought the usual fees?"

"Yes," said Rex, hoping it would not be gold, "and I have the ring."

"That is right," was the answer, with a side look at his friend.

"You have not brought any witnesses?"

"No, we did not care for any. We know we are being married, and so do you," said Rex.

"Certainly," said the other young man, who seemed suddenly to have a violent cold in his head, or the ceremony seemed to affect him, for his pocket handkerchief—a very large one—was continually hiding his face. "I will be witness and give the bride away. Now then, what is your name?"

"Robert."

"Who gave you this name?"

"My godfathers and godmother in my baptism."

"You are not going all through the catechism, are you?" asked Dot, in a fright, "it is so dreadfully long."

"Hush!" said Rex, who was wondering the same thing.

"Robert, wilt thou have this little girl for thy wife, to love her in sickness and in health as long as you live?"

"I will," said Rex decidedly.

"What is your name?" addressing the bride.

"Dot."

"Your real name?"

"It is only Dot."

"Yes, quite true," added Rex, "only 'Dot.'"

"Dot, wilt thou have this little boy for thy husband, to love, honour, and obey him in sickness——?"

"He must obey me when he is ill," interrupted Dot, "for——"

"Hush!" said Rex, in a whisper, "say 'I will.'"

"I will."

At this moment there was a noise of wheels, and the young men looked at their watches.

"Look sharp—time's up."

"Write your names in this book," said one, reaching down a large dusty volume from a high shelf.

So the names of "Robert Rover" and "Dot" were entered, with the date of their marriage.

"What are the fees?" asked Rex, in a business-like way, taking out his purse.

"We never take money from such young couples as you, so we will only wish you many happy returns of the day some fifteen years hence, and many years' happiness now, and then."

Rex looked very happy indeed. It was a great relief to him about the money, for he had not much in his purse. So they all shook hands, and the bride and bridegroom hastened away.

It was fortunate they did not linger outside, or they would

have been astonished at the shouts of laughter which succeeded their departure, the hilarity gaining such a height, that the old registry book was flung on the floor, stamped upon, and leaped over, after which vent of superfluous steam, they began to conjecture who the children were, and to what class they belonged, who evidently so thoroughly believed in what they were doing. It was no mere fun, but a great reality.

They got into the train and returned to Briarwood, not remarking two men who were watching them from a third-class carriage. They walked up from the village to the little churchyard. As they opened the gate they saw a woman leave the porch of the eastern entrance, and they hurried up the path, fearing to find the door locked. To their delight it was open, but not anyone was in the edifice. As Rex took off his cap he placed his finger to his lips, and the two children walked silently up to the altar, taking a prayer book out of a pew nearest it. Then, after a minute, Rex took hold of Dot's hand and said, "I take thee, Dot, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance, and thereto I plight thee my troth."

Then Dot took hold of Rex's hand, and said and promised the same, and afterwards the bridegroom took out the ring, and placed it on the finger of his little bride. Finally they knelt down, and he prayed that God would join their hands, and make them His own children, that they might live to grow up and love each other all their lives; that he might be a good man like his father, and his "General," saving many lives; that Dot might find her parents, if they were good ones, but never, if they were bad, but that he might always protect her.

Dot seemed greatly awed by the service. She had not been in a church for months, and that fact, and Rex's opinion that it was very wicked, solemnised her; but the finishing

stroke was what she considered Rex's wonderful prayer, all out of his own head. She really followed with her heart, under a new feeling of how good God was in saving her from her enemies, and now He, Himself, joining her hands with such a kind, clever, wonderful husband.

There had been many simple weddings and many grand ones in that church, but never had vows been taken with more earnestness of purpose and heartfelt—yes, heart to heart sincerity—than were uttered by these two children. Then they kissed each other and looked exceedingly happy as they came out of the church, when Dot took out the packet of rice and they pelted and half smothered each other with it, until several people, walking up that same path afterwards, asked what wedding had taken place that day, as so much rice was sprinkled about.

"Now we will pretend we have said good-bye to everybody, and are going off in our carriage for our honeymoon," said Rex, as they came out of the Youngs' gate with their treasures, without, alas! being seen by anybody.

Yes. Alas!

"Fortune favours the brave!" exclaimed the bridegroom, throwing more rice at his bride, which she returned with interest. Then he took off his cap and waved it at a crowd of imaginary guests, and then hastened to their carriage.

It closely resembled a bathing machine with two seats in it. The only thing not there was the queer looking-glass of only bathing type, the sole use of which is to render you as hideous as possible. There was a stool, upon which they spread their wedding-breakfast.

"The bride must cut the cake," said Rex, handing her a broken knife that Mrs. Young had given him.

She held it in her hand over the frosted cake.

"Why did you nudge me in church and point? I was saying exactly the same as you did."

"That is why I pointed. The next piece was yours," said Rex.

"Why, they were both alike!"

"No, they were not. You had to say, 'obey' in yours," replied the little lord of the creation.

Dot had by this time cut the cake. Handing it to him with a sweet smile, she warbled,

"If you I always must obey,
Wife, darling, you must say.
A new name, Robin, I give to thee—
'Husband, dearest,' you are to me."

At this moment a dark shadow enveloped the machine.

"The door is shut," cried Dot.

"I'll soon open it," said Rex, springing at it.

Not so easy. It resisted all his efforts. Their joint strength was of no avail.

"It's Roy, I know," said Rex. "I'll look," jumping on the seats, he endeavoured to see out of the window, while Dot tried the other; but they could not meet with any success. Not anybody was in sight. Rex knocked against the window.

"Roy! I say, come in here, or let us come to you, Roy—Roy!"

Not a sound.

"Never mind, he has gone on, and is coming back again to undo the door, thinking he has given us a fright. When we hear him coming we will both begin to sing, and let him know that we don't mind a bit. Let us go on with our wedding breakfast."

"Yes, we have not had any grapes yet!"

The children were very merry, Dot entertaining her bridegroom with wonderful stories in her past life, and Rex reading out the most interesting incidents in that of his "General," working up Dot till her enthusiasm was becoming almost as great as his.

"Do you know, Dot, I think I shall act as he did."

"Not go away and kill people to save others, I hope," said she.

"No; but should I be called away to fill a post of danger I think I shall do as he did—send my wife home to my mother to be taken care of."

"You cannot do that," said Dot. "You promised at the altar to take care of me yourself, 'till death do us part,' and so we must wait for that. 'God has joined us together; let no man put asunder.' Think how many times you read that over in the garden, and afterwards, and now to talk of 'sundering it' yourself. Oh!—What's that?"

There was a slight noise at the window, and the next instant all was darkness.

"Roy, is that you?" called Rex, once more flying at the door; but his repeated calls and kicks were of no avail.

"I think it is Mr. Young," suggested Dot. "You know it was standing at one of his fields, and he said he would have a fine bit of fun with us some day, and play us a trick or two. And this is one of them. He thinks we shall be very frightened in the dark; but he will see we are not. It will not last long, for he is too busy. Perhaps it is Mr. Royston, too?"

"Halloa! we're moving," cried Rex.

The machine was shaking, and presently it was evidently going on.

"Yes, you see, they are both dragging it. No, it is too heavy for them. They have brought a horse up and are going to land us at his house, or at the haystack. If we bump about we shall know," said Rex. "Let us sing some songs."

So the two little voices blended very prettily together for a long time; then they washed down the various ditties with some grapes.

"It is not worse than being in a tunnel, except that there is always a light," remarked Rex.

The same noise as before, and once more the windows

showed themselves, with sunshine streaming in. Rex jumped up at them.

"Only fields and trees. Not a house to be seen; and——"

He could say no more. Again the sliding shutter caused instant darkness. Then there was a slight noise overhead, and something fell on them, and around.

"Don't be frightened, Dot, I believe it is something nice. Yes, I have caught one. It must be nuts and apples, so it is Roy or Mr. Young. I have a box of lucifer matches in my pocket, so we shall soon see," and, suiting the action to the word, the small light revealed some filberts, just plucked it seemed from the trees, and a few apples and pears.

"Thanks, Roy," they both called out, "it's jolly; but would be jollier if you came in here too. Do come."

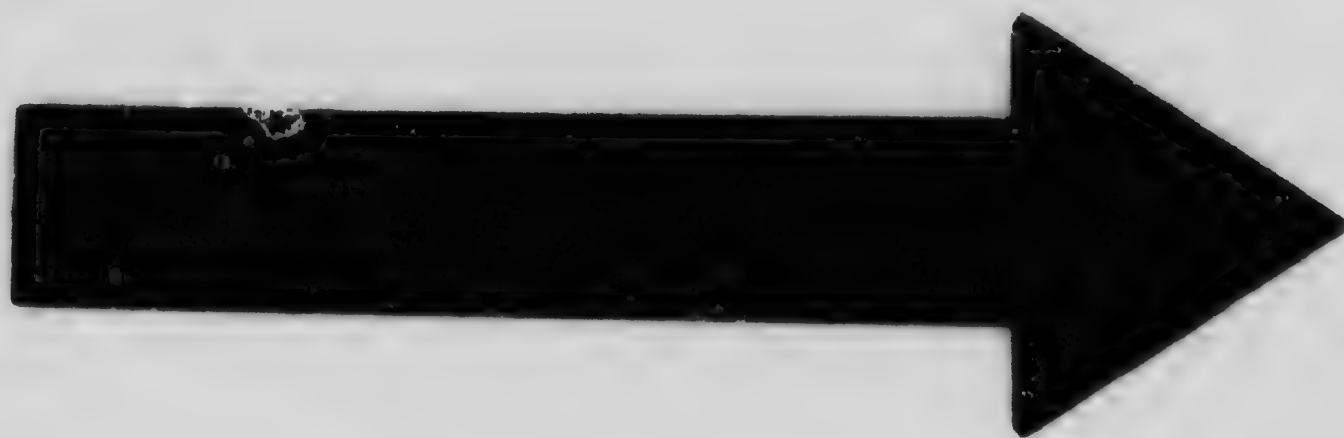
There was not any response to this, only a quicker movement of the machine, until at last it grated on stones and then came to a sudden stop. The door opened, and as Rex ran forward to meet Roy, Dot gave a piercing scream at the sight of a short, thick-set man, whom Rex recognized as Jumper, and *they were at the door of the "Haunted House."*

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the little man. "So you did not know it was your old friend who was showering upon you nuts and apples? Those are nice thanks to give him when he fetches you home. Glad to see you again, young gentleman. Welcome to the 'Haunted House!' I'll let you into a trick or two worth knowing, for you're a plucky youngster, and not afraid of your own shadow."

Rex held up his head with a quick jerk, as much as to say he was not afraid of his either. At the same time he put his arm round Dot, and whispered,

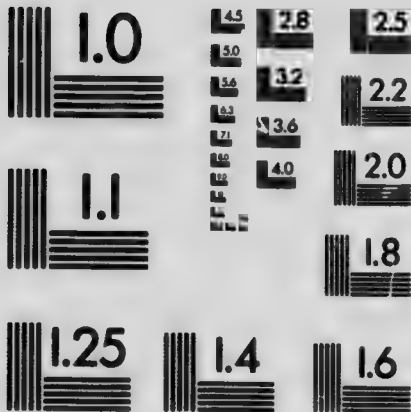
"Don't cry, dear, I am here to protect you," adding aloud, "She is so afraid of the bear, you see, she is only a little girl."

"Well, I doubt if she will have much more to do with him."



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It was all through her that he broke his leg. She let him escape."

"I never did, Mr. Jumper," cried Dot.

"Yes, I know it was all your fault, somehow, all along of that tricycle and running after this little boy. You're beginning early with your pranks, Miss Dot."

Rex began explaining how the tricycle was stolen property, but received such an agonized grip and whisper of, "Oh, don't!" that he thought it best to hold his tongue, and said instead,

"I am sure Dot would not have broken the bear's leg on purpose, Mr. Jumper."

"Didn't say she had. I only know she must have let you in at the gate."

"No, indeed she did not. I walked all round somewhere by the tea gardens, and by myself."

"Well, I don't know how you did it all; but this I do know, that Dot had a finger in the pie, and somehow or other the bear got loose and ran off, and I'm glad she had a jolly good fright, and thought he was after her, when the brute was caught in a trap all the time. Ha! ha! biter bit now. You are both caught in my trap. Never mind, I'll forgive you. If you are both good children you shall have a jolly time of it yet, and we'll begin by a fine supper. Come along, and I'll tell you some stories, young gentleman. Mother! mother! come and receive the 'prince and princess,' they have arrived in their carriage."

In answer to the repeated call, Mrs. Jumper appeared at the window.

"Come upstairs, Dot, and you had better bring that young gentleman with you."

Rex captured his belongings from the bathing machine, and followed Dot up a staircase, that was evidently the grand one of the house; it was so broad, and so many rooms leading out of the large landing, reminding him something of his own

home. Then she turned down a corridor and came to a small room, which opened into a much more commodious one, but the style of furniture was so varied, that it was difficult to tell what kind of room it was intended to represent—half drawing, half dining-room—when, suddenly coming round a painted screen, he saw a bed with crimson curtains, while at one end there was a small stage, and theatrical dresses and appointments strewed the place.

Supper presently appeared with Mrs. Jumper.

She kissed Dot, saying,

"I don't know whether I'm glad or sorry you've come back. I thought that perhaps you had found a real home where this little boy lives."

"They were very kind to me," said Dot. "Why did Mr. Jumper steal me again?"

"He never stole you, Dot, you must never say that. He gave a lot of money for you, and you had no business to run away."

"She never did run away," interrupted Rex and Dot together.

"Indeed, I did not. I only meant to go to the gate; but I saw the bear running after us, so I could only go on. I was too frightened to go back, of course, with Bruin there. Are you ill, Mrs. Jumper?" asked Dot, presently.

"Yes, I am seldom well now, and Jumper thinks I can do more than I can; and he raged at me because he thought he had lost you. He seems awfully glad to get you again, so don't either of you put him out of temper, that's all. You are a great favourite with him, young gentleman; but Dot, you see, hates him as much as the bear, and he sees it."

"You must not hate anybody, Dottie."

"Mrs. Jumper hates him," said Dot, crestfallen. "I have heard her say it."

"Hush! here he is!"

And Mrs. J. proceeded hastily to the kitchen, whence

sundry savoury perfumes issued, and which were speedily placed on the table, to the delight of the master of the feast, who rubbed his hands, laughed, showed Rex over the room, and what he liked best, gave him leave to touch anything he fancied.

"Have you any wild animals at present?" enquired the boy.

"Ah! Wait and see," replied the man, with a knowing look at Dot.

"You don't mean to say you have been buying any lions and tigers?" cried Dot, clasping her little hands, and paling with the idea.

"Ha! ha! young lady, take care how you go into the barred rooms downstairs."

Mrs. Jumper was about speaking in answer to an appealing look in Dot's scared face, but a side frown from her husband silenced her.

"You would have liked the adventures in the old circus days," said he, addressing Rex. "I could spin you a yarn of what I have gone through as a youngster that would keep your eyes open all night."

"Spin away now," said Rex. "I'm not sleepy, and should like to know. You must have had great fun travelling about."

"You eat that, my boy, and I'll tell you a bit of behind the scenes, of what you call fun," said Jumper, placing a huge piece of plum tart on his plate, who immediately passed it on to Dot.

"It is no use your doing the *perlite* to the 'princess,'" laughed he, "she eats like a canary. Give her some bird-seed."

It was evidently not the food upon which Mr. Jumper flourished. Rex looked at his plate in amazement, it was so frequently replenished with viands, and washed down with various liquids and fluids.

"There, my boy, drink that," said he, placing a hot concoction before him. "That will make you as merry as a grig. You can give just one drop to Dot, till the colour comes back to her cheeks."

"No, thank you," said Rex, passing it back again instead of on to his bride, "I never take anything but water."

"You are not tied to your mother's apron-strings to-day, boy. Do as you like."

"I was never tied to anybody's apron strings," said Rex, with a quick jerk of his head. "I am doing as I like," and he pushed the tumbler a little farther off. "How I should like to hear you sing the duet with your wonderful donkey, for——" He stopped. Dot had given him a tug and a little kick. Was he telling tales out of school, or, in other words, divulging what she had told him? Fortunately he did not catch at it as he might have done before supper, and Dot suffered accordingly.

"Ah! my lad, you've knocked the right nail on its head, I can tell you. Daisy has a ring in her voice that attracts the house in the same way as Jenny Lind did, and lots of other *prima donnas*. I can say I feel proud the way we are received. We get three rounds right away. I think she will talk some day when I least expect it; but she is not such an ass as that, for she knows she would have a word-part to study. We sing a song together, in which I have taught her to join in on a certain note, and a bray though it is, it's a knowing thing to do, and always takes tremendously, and never fails to get her an encore. She's a born genius, that she is. I was going to tell you about the travelling that you think jolly."

"Yes, I should like to go a journey with all the animals," said Rex. "I would teach Daisy another song, and Dot and I could ride on the elephant."

"Which you would find particularly agreeable in the rain," laughed the man. "Many an older branch of the public is

just as ignorant as you, I'll bet, as to what goes on in the sawdust and behind the scenes, or rather the tarpaulin. The public care nothing for our ups and downs; they pay their money and get their seats, so they don't care, so as the horse is there to gallop and the clown to laugh."

"The fairy to jump, and the donkey to bray," interrupted Dot, with a little laugh. It was not often she interrupted Jumper, but he was in his best mood that evening, and she was next to her grand protecting husband, who was so enjoying the stories, that she forgot about possible wild beasts downstairs, and entered into the fun.

"Yes, Dot, you're right. I don't know what we should do without you; but you're getting so proud with your encores and the bouquets, she's just smothered with 'em sometimes, ain't you, my beauty? You will soon be making your own terms with the public. But, as I was going to say, it's a trying thing to get up and start at daybreak, when we are on a tour—it is a packing up. Despite the weather, we have to go on, accidents on bad roads or not, for we have been advertised at the next town, for a fixed day and hour, so there we must be according to the billposters, who work ahead of the company; and the big canvas and tent pitchers, who have already gone on. On arriving at the pitch, the whole company is busy at once, preparing for the grand parade right through the town before the first performance.

"I saw it," said Rex, eagerly. "I am sure I have seen it at Hastings, and there was a little girl on a white pony like Dot."

"That was not us. We have not been at Hastings since either of you were born."

"We go on at that fun for days together. The company retire for the night dead beat, and go to sleep with the knowledge that they have only a few hours rest ere they must be up again to make the next fixture. It's pretty stiff work; but there is one great advantage about it, there is not the trouble of varying the performance, as each is to take place at a different

town. Living on the road is all very well in fine weather, but when it is a wet season it takes the shine out of you, it does—the struggle along muddy lanes and over windy downs.”

“That’s just what I like,” exclaimed Rex. “Running over the downs in a high wind.”

“Not in soaking rain, lad. Performing then, perhaps, to an empty tent on sodden turf, churned into mud under the dripping canvas. Many a show has been stone-broke by bad weather, and after a game fight for it on half salaries and hotel credit, has been sold up under its own canvas, and not so much as a big drum left to start upon afresh. It is very difficult to be funny at such times; but I’m more considerate for my company. I had harder lines when I was a youngster, and considered very smart. I was engaged once at a small show to take the ‘wheeze,’ which means to lead the laugh at the clown’s jokes. It was a bad time, for we had had rain for nearly two months—benches more than half empty, and each night it became worse. At last, for two weeks, I had the laugh all to myself, with the boss swearing at me between the acts because it was not half good enough to fetch ‘em; and at last I had an awful cold, and just as I had a lead to do I sneezed, and the next morning I got the sack—quite a crisis in my life—only five shillings in my purse, in the wilds of the Highlands; but I got a fresh start through an old pal. It is too long to tell you, but I gradually got higher and higher till I’m governor and boss myself.”

“I’ve always pitied a clown,” said Mrs. Jumper. “Never mind whether he is ill or well, happy or broken-hearted, on he has to go with that awful laugh.”

“Did you ever have a dreadful headache, Mr. Jumper?” asked Dot—“like mother’s I mean—and had to laugh?”

“I believe ye,” replied the Boss, with contracted brows and clenched teeth at the remembrance of certain episodes of the past. “I’ve had headache and toothache, earache and side-ache, all at once, each of ‘em running a race as to which could

ache the most ; but the heartache has come in and swallowed them all up in its awful agony. But the mask gave the grin, and I shouted, and the audience roared and clapped. Grimaldi, the most famous clown that ever trod the sawdust, used to have the tears running down his cheeks behind his mask at the same moment that the house was ringing with deafening shouts of laughter he had himself set going. But it is not only clowns who wear masks, young gentleman," added the actor, fixing his eyes on Rex with some hidden meaning. Then he helped himself to some more fluid out of a high bottle, and gave a long peal of laughter.

"The prettiest thing I ever had for the clown business was a monkey I had trained to burlesque with me the tricks in the ring—the riding and rope-walking. In spite of the strict severity necessary in training an animal, he had a real affection for me."

"You did not beat it, did you?" asked Rex.

"Yes, when requisite. 'Spare the rod, spoil the monkey' You can translate that, young gentleman, into 'What is a school without the rod,' eh? You know the feel."

"No, I don't," flashed the boy. "I have never been to school, and am never go

"I say, youngster, mild. My throat is not very narrow, I can swallow a lot; but that is past my powers. A smart lad like you, who knows, without counting, 'how many beans make five,' to pretend you've had no schooling."

"The 'Board School' will be after your father," suggested Mrs. Jumper, who was taking advantage of her husband's happy humour, to sit quietly in her chair.

"I go to the board school!" cried Rex, with an electric start of head and shoulders. "I'm my own father, and the world is my school." Then suddenly recollecting himself, added, "Please go on with the monkey."

Jumper opened his eyes very wide and looked at the boy;

then lighted his pipe and looked again ; and then husband and wife gave each other a look, and he added,

"Decidedly novel, ain't it?"

"Is the monkey here?" said Rex. "May I see it?"

"I wish you could, boy, with all my heart. I did love him. You would like to have seen us practise together for hours at a time, over and over again, with the trick in hand, until he could see his way and preserve his hold on it. The whip was more often held over him in warning than on him for punishment ; it's quiet patience that wins them. When I walked into the ring, personating some known character, dressed in his style, with my monkey got up in the same manner, leaning on my arm, each with an eye-glass and pegtop whiskers, we brought down the house straight off. That monkey was a fortune for three years, when he was taken ill during a severe winter we had—took a chill while waiting for our act to come on. The cold generally finishes off performing monkeys. Why ! what's up, boy?"

"I think it is time we went," said Rex, suddenly remarking the growing twilight.

"No ; it is not time at all," said Jumper. "You stay where you are, and glad to see you."

"Thank you very much ; but we must go. They will be dreadfully anxious about us already."

"'Us'—'we!' Who are those people?" laughed Mrs. Jumper. "'Us'—'we!'"

"Why, Dot and I are 'us,'" said Rex. "She belongs to me. I have promised to protect her and never to leave her."

"Oh, indeed," chimed in Mr. Jumper, "that is news. Then you had better stay here and fulfil your promise," and the husband and wife laughed, for once together, on a united subject.

"We are very much obliged to you for all the fun, though we would rather have seen where we were going ; and thanks, too, for the supper and stories. It's jolly ; but our friends

will think we are lost, or drowned, or that the bear has eaten us both up."

"Yes, they will be dreadfully frightened," chimed in Dot.

"Yes, come along," said Rex. "Good-night, Mr. Jumper. Thank you ;" and he shook hands with him and Mrs. Jumper.

Dot rose and did the same in a much slower manner, with one eye on Rex and the other on the Jumpers, who returned the shake of their hands very heartily.

"Good-night to your 'Royal Highnesses.' I suppose your carriage stops the way. Ha ! ha ! my gracious and profound compliments to your new friends."

The bridegroom caught up his coat and his "General," while the bride arrayed herself in her hat, which the roses still lined, rather faint by this time.

Then they reached the door together. *It was locked.* They tried the next, opening on to the staircase. *That was locked too.*

A look of fear crept over Dot's face ; but Rex began trying to unfasten the door. The key had gone.

"Please will you unlock this?" said he, and looked up surprised at the shouts of laughter his simple question had called forth.

"I am too afraid of thieves and robbers to do that, and don't you know you are in the 'Haunted House?' I wonder you are not afraid to venture out in the dusk. Few of the villagers would come out here after sundown."

Rex was upon the point of saying that he knew all the stories were bosh ; that what frightened the people were only masks and lights, but behind the screen. Dot had placed her finger to her lips, and then a quaking whisper not to divulge what she had told him.

"Please let us out," he repeated. "We shall be home before it is very dark, and there will be the moon."

"Do you think we are going to part so readily with such a charming addition to our company?" laughed the Boss, "not

if I know it. Why, I thought you wanted to see all the animals—the elephant and monkeys?”

“So I do,” replied Rex; “and if you will let us out now, I promise to come back in the morning. Won’t we, Dot?”

“Yes,” said the bride. “I promise, ‘I will—I will,’” she repeated, with all the fervour, as if she were again before the altar with her little brave husband.

“Ha! ha! I dare say. Not if I know it. Should be sorry for my life to depend on seeing your sweet faces again if once I see your backs.”

“I do speak the truth. I do not tell stories,” said Rex. “I will even come back to-night if you will only let us go now and tell our friends we are safe. The gentleman I am staying with will be awfully vexed.”

“Why, you must be a diamond of the first water!” said Jumper, opening his eyes wide at him. “Well, I’m like you, I’m often wanted. Ha! ha!”

“Please let me go——” Rex was going to add “without Dot,” and promise to fetch her next day. But had he not that very morning vowed to protect her? How could he break his promise and leave her behind?

“Never mind, Dot,” he whispered, “Mr. Young and Roy will come after us, and——”

“Hush!” returned Dot in his ear. “Don’t say that to them or the whole place will be full of ghosts, traps, and guns, to frighten them away. I have been so afraid you might say something about Mr. Roy coming.”

Dot sat down behind the screen, looking very miserable; and Rex walked about the room, pretending to look at the things, but in reality to watch the door and the windows, to see if there were any possible means of escape. The latter were too high to jump out, even if he had the opportunity.

The Jumpers spoke to each other in a low tone, and went into another room, locking the door after them.

Rex sprang to the others, and tried by every means in his power to open them. Oh, if he could only find the key, as he did at the hotel, under the carpet. He made a rush at the window and peered out into the growing twilight.

"Is there anything to cling to, I wonder?"

"No, not there."

"I think I might manage, but you could not, Dot."

"Would you like—to—to—go and leave me?" enquired Dot, mournfully.

"Leave my wife? No! Don't be frightened."

"I can jump and I can climb."

"I wish I could undo this shutter," said Rex, jumping on to a chair.

"Please do not try. If Jumper sees you trying to escape he might do something dreadful," said Dot. "Let us pretend to be very happy and comfortable, and I will sing and dance, and you shall act and be the orchestra and the audience, all in one."

Rex thought that a very good idea, though he was surprised at Dot being able, in a moment, to transfer herself from that which was miserable into all that was gay. She ran round the screen and brought out a violin and bow.

"Play away, hubby, dear."

Then she appeared on the miniature stage, and danced and sung according to Rex's playing, till Jumper appeared again with his wife and a young man, to whom he said in a low voice,

"They are all right. Amuse them and they will forget about going home; but we must look out to-morrow. They must be taken off somewhere, or there will be enquiries."

The two men had been advancing across the room, and Dot, catching sight of them, had stopped singing for the moment, and as Rex was playing very softly, not quite remembering the bar, he distinctly heard the words, "they—taken off—will be enquiries." "*They*," he felt sure, were Dot and himself.

What was going to be done with them? He would take his cue from her, and pretend to be very merry; but he would watch the first moment that offered to make their escape. A grand adventure might be in store for him. Roy would guess they had been taken prisoners and by whom, so would come and storm the place until they were given up. He little thought how this knowledge buoyed him up and helped him to laugh and sing, and listen to the stories and fun the two men were talking about over the contents of various bottles.

Suddenly there was a great noise of wheels, many voices, and loud bangs at the door.

Could that be Roy?

The two children looked at each other in anxious enquiry, and Rex gave some violent scrapes on his violin, not certainly in harmony with Herr Joachim, but decidedly in perfect tune to the beatings of his heart. The two men rose and went out. Although they left the door ajar, neither ventured to follow. No doubt one was watching outside, and Mrs. Jumper was backwards and forwards from the inner room.

Dot watched Rex's eyes fixed on the door, afraid that her husband, in his bravery, would rush headlong down the stairs, so her first finger, raised with a jerk peculiar to her, warned him to keep where he was.

"If they were to catch us on the stairs, they might make us sleep with the bear."

"Sleep!" repeated he, with a laugh. "I doubt about the sleeping, for——"

Jumper put his head in.

"Come here, you two—be quick."

Rex had his things on a chair behind the screen, and so had Dot, ready to be off at a moment's notice, so catching them up, they ran after him, hoping they should see Roy waiting at the foot of the stairs. But only strange faces met

their wistful eyes. They were conducted down a long stone corridor, out of which went several passages. A waft of fresh evening breeze told Rex there was an open door near at hand. Had it not been for Dot, he would have run the risk, and given him the slip. As it was, he kept at her side, still trusting that it might be his friends yet.

"There, you stay in that room," said Jumper, suddenly opening a door. "There is a light, and when that's out the moon will shine in; but you'll be asleep before that. I've company come, and if they go soon, you can return to us; but the best thing you can do is to go to sleep, for you may have a long journey before you."

"A great many miles?" asked Rex.

"Yes, over a hundred or more."

"On the sea or land?"

"Perhaps 'yes'—perhaps 'no'—perhaps both, and perhaps not at all;" and he went rapidly out, locking the door after him.

CHAPTER X.

FOUND AND LOST.

A SMALL table stood in the centre of the desolate-looking room, which only possessed that piece of furniture and an old horse-hair, rickety sofa. A small piece of candle cast a glimmering light on the unpapered walls.

Rex held up his fist in the direction of the door, as if he would fain have given his host, or his jailor, a practical bit of his mind.

"What's this for, I should like to know? It is a prison. We have done nothing wrong, and I won't be put in prison for nothing, and you shall not be either," and Rex began tugging away at the door, and then knocking, begging, and insisting upon being let out.

"Robin, don't be making that row, it will only put the Boss in a wax if he hears it, which I don't think he will, he's too far off. I believe he doesn't want all those people to see us, they might split on him. He won't never let me be seen privately. It is no use shaking those bars, they won't move for you, nor nobody."

Rex was flying all over the room.

"I wish this were the top of the house," said he, putting his head up the yawning chimney, "then we might get on to the roof and escape."

"Oh, Robin! I have been a great height, but I have never been up a chimney. Is that how brides and bride-

grooms amuse themselves on their wedding day?" said Dot comically.

"I have never heard of any being imprisoned on their marriage day," said Rex, making another dart at the barred windows.

"I am so tired and sleepy," said Dot. "I wish I was at Mrs. Young's. Anyhow, I would rather be down here with you, Robin, than in a lovely room without you."

And having delivered this wife-like sentiment, the bride sat down on the sofa, with folded hands and an April look on her face—half cloud, half sunshine.

"Don't sit on that filthy thing!" cried Rex. "I believe it came out of the ark, and has never been dusted since."

"But where am I to sit, Robin?"

"Don't sit—stand. Look here, I'll move this dirty old cover off the table. There, it will do as a duster. Now I'll put my great coat on, and you shall sit on it, wife," said Rex, suiting the action to the word.

"Not your beautiful new coat. It's a pity."

"It's not new, and it's not a pity. Remember what I promised at the altar, 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' We will both sit on it. That will be more like bride and bridegroom, won't it, wife dear?"

"Yes, hubby, darling. We will have a bit of the 'General.'"

And so they both sat perched on the table, Rex with one hand grasping the book and the other round Dot, who was holding the light.

"How horribly that candle smells!" said Rex. "It makes me sick."

"You are so very particular, Rob, with your eyes and nose. You see it's only a dip candle."

"I don't know anything about 'dips,' except jolly dips in the sea. Oh, I say, what's that rubbish in the corner?"

"Only paper and wood."



REN TOOK HOLD OF THE BAR NEAREST HIM AND SHOOK IT.

"Then we will have a fire—a grand blaze."

Quick as thought the bride and bridegroom sprang from the table, and soon the fireplace was filled with paper and wood, nice knobbly bits, dried by the summer's sun, which crackled and flamed up to their hearts' content.

"This is the illumination in honour of our wedding," said Rex. "I'll blow out this filthy candle, and then it will last longer when the fire goes out."

So the happy couple drew the table before the blaze, and Rex read scraps from his "General."

"Oh—look!" cried Dot, suddenly.

Rex glanced in the direction of her frightened gaze, and saw the face of the bear looking through the bars.

"Dot, come and look at him. He can't hurt you through the window and bars. You ought to look upon him as our 'mutual friend.' If it had not been for the bear we should never have met—we should never have been married to-day."

"I don't like him any the better for that. Has he a collar on and a chain?"

"Yes."

"Then we are all right; we are in the room next to his den. I can send him away in a moment by lighting a lucifer match in his face. Did you leave those you had in the bathing machine?"

"No, they are in my pocket; but I'm not going to send him away yet. I want a game with him," said Rex, opening the window, which he had from the first unsnapped.

The bear retreated for a moment, then he came back as the window opened, and Rex took hold of the bar nearest him and shook it, swaying to and fro. The animal thought he was to have a lesson evidently, for he took the next in his grasp, and as Rex rocked so did Bruin, till suddenly the bar loosened in its socket.

"Hurrah!" cried Rex, "I can pull it out now."

"He will get in!" cried Dot, "and you know the den is

locked, and we can't get out. Oh, Robin, Robin! think how awful to be eaten up by the bear on our wedding day."

"The old beast is going to help us to escape, Dot. Now, look here, you understand him. What does he do when you light the lucifer match?"

"Goes home as fast as he can."

"Has his den a lock?"

"Yes. Ned must have been there and forgotten it."

"Well, let us light the match at once, and the minute he turns in I'll take the bar out of the window and squeeze through. Get your things ready. Here are mine; but let us first listen if Jumper is about."

All was quiet.

"They are right away at the other side of the house, eating and drinking and making a noise; telling him all they have done, for the troupe was divided. I expect the Jumpers remained behind to look after me and you too. The dogs are not this side to-night, they are on the other, where you heard them the first time you came."

They listened at the window. Not a sound. The children took up the matches and set a light to several at once. As Dot had described, the bear shook his shaggy head, turned round, and shambled off to his den. They immediately took out the bar, which was heavier than they expected, and it would have been serious indeed had it fallen upon them. Then Rex squeezed through, and darting after the bear, shut the door upon him with its thick iron bands. As Dot saw the door close, she sprang through the aperture to see that he was quite safe, and the great key turned in the lock. Rex was half inclined to take a peep at Bruin, but desisted at Dot's pleading to be quick.

"Only think if they come and prevent us going. Oh, I do wish I had a black frock on. They will see this light one through the trees."

"That they shan't," said Rex. "You shall have my great-

coat on. I am so glad I thought of it," and he pulled it through the bars, and dressed up his little wife in it, the light of the flickering fire dancing across their faces—the boy's sparkling with the new adventure, the girl's half fear, half fun, as he shoved her arms in, she saying, with her serio-comic air,

" 'With all my worldly goods I thee endow.' "

"Yes, remember you have our 'bank' on. Don't let the bear get at it."

"Never mind if he gets me, eh, Rob?"

"I wonder how he would like to swallow those gold pills—our income for the present? Now then, let us shut the window and put in the bar."

Seeing that their things were safe outside, they managed, together, to close the window of their late prison; but it was done in great trepidation, and then they scampered off as fast as the fear of traps would allow.

"Come by the white stones, that will be the nearest, won't it?" asked Rex.

"Not quite, but the safest."

Avoiding the warren, and keeping close to the line of white stones, they had nearly reached the laurels that concealed the hidden path, when they heard low voices.

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Rex. "You can't go up a tree."

"Yes, I can," replied Dot; "but we should be seen, and I know a trick worth two of that. We are close to a pit where they hide and act ghost. Come along, here it is, hidden by these loose branches."

To Rex this novel refuge was decidedly better than a tree. The light plank over the pit was raised, and they scrambled down the three rough steps, closing it after them.

"How I should like to act ghost," said Rex, panting. "I would frighten them out of their wits' end."

"You look very like one, certainly," said the bride. "Does it not seem to you a long time since the morning?"

"Yes," said the bridegroom. "We have had a jolly wedding day."

"Wait 'ntil we are safe before you say that, Rob. I have sprained my foot. I had forgotten that Ned had made this pit deeper, so as to stand upright in it."

"Hush! Listen!"

Voices were very near, and the hearts of both bride and bridegroom were beating loudly.

Now they caught some words.

"I am thankful I put those white stones down. I hope they are still there," said a voice, that caused a great throb of delight in his heart.

"Dot! it's Roy!" and he flew up the steps, throwing the plank aside with such force, that the two gentlemen who were in the path started violently at the sudden upheaving of brushwood and plank. Rex acted goblin without meaning it, for they were considerably alarmed at the strange disturbance. Were they to be surrounded by a band of ruffians, or what? The next instant they heard, "Roy!" "Roy!" and the two children flew up before them, at least, Dot was not up so soon.

"Don't wait an instant," said Rex. "We were imprisoned and escaped. Dot has sprained her ankle getting into the pit."

"You must not walk, poor little woman," said Mr. Young, taking her up in his arms.

"Why, I thought you were a little boy," said Roy, "by the light of the moon."

"She has on my greatcoat," said Rex, stooping to pick up the rest of their things he had thrown down in his delight at seeing Roy, who suggested that they should not lose a moment.

Making quick work of the meadow, they gained the road by a short cut known to Mr. Young, who had his dog-cart waiting, into which they all sprang with the greatest alacrity.

Roy's mind had been in a violent state of exciting fear ever since dinner time, when the children were first missed. Rex sat with his arm linked tightly in his. Yet it was a great relief to find he had not run away, but had been kidnapped.

"So you thought that machine was mine, did you?" said Mr. Young. "I wish you had asked before you had entered it, and I would have told you I expected it belonged to some of that canny folk down yonder. To think you must needs go straightway and jump into the trap laid for you. How's the foot, little missy?"

"It still hurts," said Dot; "but I'm so glad I only sprained it when I got into the pit. I could never have run all that way from the house. How did you know we were there, Mr. Young?"

"It certainly first occurred to Mr. Royston when he failed to find you; but when late in the day we sat down to have something to eat before starting off in search again, it suddenly dawned on me that the bathing machine had gone, and I wondered if your prolonged absence had anything to do with it. We thought it best to try quiet measures at first; but if they had denied us admittance, or declared you were not there, and we had strong reasons to believe otherwise, my men were in call, and others waiting to whistle for the police."

"What a grand sight it would have been, Dot, to have seen the 'Haunted House' surrounded, exclaimed Rex, "Fancy Mr. Royston and Mr. Young knocking at the doors, pealing the bells, all his men rushing over the warren; the police from the villages whistling to each other, telegraphing and telephoning to the nearest towns. There are soldiers at Hedley, perhaps they would have galloped down; and then the fire brigade would think the house was on fire, and would dash down. How their helmets would shine in the moonlight, and if you and I, Dot, had been at an upper window, they would have come with the fire-escape and saved us."

"And they might all have been frightened to death by the ghosts," answered Dot, "or caught in traps, or swallowed by the bear."

"You must never say a word against that bear," cried Rex. "If he had not loosened the bar, we should be imprisoned now. He saved us." Then Rex gave a great grip of Roy's arm and was silent.

There was a group collected outside the cottage. Mrs. Young, attracted by the sound of returning wheels, stood at the gate.

"All right, wife," called her husband, "both the truants are here safe and sound."

A great many questions were asked and answered.

"I have been in a great fright about you," said she to her husband, as she tried to get off Dot's stocking without causing her pain. "I was so afraid of your being shot."

Rex came forward across the room to where Mrs. Young was kneeling, with Dot's foot in her hand.

"We are so sorry we have frightened you and everybody. Please, Roy, tell Mrs. Young that we never meant to run away. It was not our fault. I hope you do not think I did it on purpose?"

"Facts were against you at first, but not afterwards," said Mrs. Young, "How came you to get into that machine?"

"We did it for fun, pretending it was our carriage, and suddenly the door was fastened on us, then soon after the windows closed. We thought it was you and Roy until the door opened and Dot recognized Jumper and gave a scream."

"Poor mite," said Mrs. Young, "I am glad you have escaped once more."

Roy was taking finishing notes of his ship when Rex came into his room, "General" in hand, and greatcoat on his arm. Lying on the floor was an envelope, which Rex picked up, and caught sight of a name on it, "Sir Roland Radcliffe."

The boy stood spell-bound for a few moments, till Roy looked up.

"Well, old man, what is it?"

"Rob; have you been writing to *him*?" showing the envelope.

"How stupid of me; that dropped out of my letter-book."

"Please tell me the truth. Have you?" was the eager question again.

"No, Rob, I have not written; but I intended to do so by to-night's post, had I not found you."

Our hero raised his deep lustrous eyes and fixed them on Roy, half in fear, half in questioning surprise.

Whatever Roy might have done a few weeks ago, now he would not, could not deceive that pleading glance. Throwing his arm round the boy, he said,

"Rob, I mean what I say. I had only written what you see there, the simple name, to be filled in if—if you were lost. Oh, dear lad, you little know what I felt when I saw you jump out of that pit! From what you and Dot say, you have had a wonderful escape. They evidently meant to take you far away to-morrow. Thank God, old man."

Rex knew, by the look in Roy's eyes, that he said what he meant, sealed as it was by a warm kiss, that reminded him of home, and quieted him after the great excitement of the day.

Dot went to bed directly, with her ankle bound carefully by Mrs. Young. She lay wide awake, thinking over that ever to be remembered red-letter day in their lives.

"Dottie, are you asleep?" said Rex.

"No, I wonder I'm not. I'm so tired."

"Roy was saying just now what a wonderful escape we have had, and that we ought to thank God. And so we ought. Father and the 'General' would say so too. I have just been reading our portion that we did not read together,

because we had not quite finished the short bits of the marriage-service this morning. Do you know, Dot, it is quite wonderful how the verses fit in, 'Thou hast taken me out of the pit, and out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock.' 'I am with thee to deliver thee.' 'The angel of His presence saved them.'"

"How lovely that last is," said Dot.

"Yes; and the bear was sent to save us too."

"You don't call the bear an angel, Rob?"

"No; but God sent him and closed his mouth, as He did lions, and kept him from biting or scratching. I have thought since how he might have hurt us when we were tugging at that bar."

"Yes," said Dot. "He might have knocked down another over us, and made a great opening, and come in and hugged us and eaten us up. Yes, God has been very good to us."

"Then let us tell Him so, and thank Him."

"Yes," said Dot, trying to kneel up in bed; but her ankle gave a twinge, that made her lie down again. So she folded her little hands and followed Rex in his short, simple thanksgiving, just to the point.

"Don't you think, as this is the first day of our marriage, you might say a few words too? Mother and father always pray alone together. They have done it ever since the first day of their marriage, and so did the 'General,' and so let us. You will soon grow into it, if you ask God to teach you. For he says, 'In *everything* let your requests be made known unto God,' which means we are to go straight to Him for what we really want, and not pray for what we don't want."

So Dottie gave a very literal rendering of those words, and thanked God with all her little heart for taking her once more out of the "Haunted House," and sending the bear to do it (but might she never see her enemy again). Then how that day had been the longest and happiest of her life,

and that she might be very grateful for such a good and clever husband, and that they might never be separated all their lives, and that God would bless them and make them both more and more good for ever.

And then Rex hurried back to Roy with conflicting feelings—fond thoughts of home, and very fond ones, too, of Roy, for whom he entertained a strange clinging affection. He was always wishing he were his elder brother. And no wonder; there was a strange fascination about Roy, and Rex knew not how he himself had drawn out his deepest feelings.

Tired as our hero was, he could not sleep. Roy was turning out things and putting them in other places, or in a box; taking out a portmanteau and packing clothes in it. He was surely making preparations for his departure, and that his own fate would be sealed at the same time, for he felt quite sure that a telegram or letter would announce the fact to his father. He could not separate from Roy and Dot. Then he thought for a long time. No, he could not and he would not. So long after Roy was asleep, he was now and then watched by two large eyes, which, in the moonlight, looked darker than ever in their expressive thoughtfulness, which the closed mouth showed were those of decision.

"Rob, what are you going to do to-day?" said Roy, after breakfast.

"I am going to take care of Dot. Mrs. Young says if she keeps her foot up it will be all right to-morrow; and Mr. Young says that we had better not go out of the gate all day—nor show myself on the roadside of the house or garden until they have left the 'Haunted House.' Dot says they won't be in a hurry to go now. They will try to catch her first."

Rex was going to say "catch us," but he thought that might alarm Roy. He assured him again that he had not the slightest intention of leaving Dot.

Neither had he.

"I think you ought to do some lessons, Mrs. Dot," said he, "now that you have married a gentleman. You say very queer things sometimes, that my sister would be scolded for. You shall do a little dictation," added her lord and master, remembering how that was generally visited upon him by way of fixing certain things in his head.

"Is that how your mother and father began their married life?" said Dot, with a succession of little nods. "Did he give her dictation to do on their wedding tour?"

"You see, they were grown up," replied Rex, "and she was a lady, and finished her education long before she was married. She is so clever, knows everything, and that is what you must do."

"It takes a great many years to know everything," said Dot. "I know a lot now, and I suppose, by the time I am twenty, I shall know everything."

"My father says, 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing,' so, Dot, you and I had better get out of danger by learning everything we can. How is your foot? Is that bandage too tight?"

"No, it's beautiful. I shall be able to dance to-night."

"No, you are to do nothing of the kind. You may have to travel very soon. Dot, can I trust you with a secret?"

"Of course you can. Have I said a word about our being married?"

This is a greater secret than even that. Mind, you are not to give a hint even that you have a secret. You have promised to obey me, so you must," added the young lord of creation, holding up his finger, and speaking in a serious emphatic manner.

"I was the page in 'The Fatal Secret,'" said the little actress, "and know what it all means, and how dreadful to breathe it to a soul as he did, for he—that was I—whispered it to my great friend, who told the other page, who was in such a rage at my knowing it first, that he went on and told

the lady's maid, who told the butler, who told the valet, who actually told the Count himself. Oh, it was shocking! I will tell you all the story, and——"

"Not now—shut up on that, for it was all bosh after all," interrupted Rex. "Mine is all real. The 'General' says a man should have no secrets from his wife, and so, Dottie, look here, I cannot part from Roy. I do so love him, and I mean to go with him to the West Indies."

"Not without me. Oh, not without me!" cried Dot, piteously. "We were never to separate 'until death do us part.'"

"I don't want to part, I love you too much for that; but I was thinking how can you rough it through the voyage, as I mean to do?"

"I expect I can rough it better than you can," said Dot, with a knowing nod.

"But I mean to hide," said Rex.

"That's very easy," replied she, with a wave of her hand. "Two can play at that."

"Perhaps I shall have to work my passage out."

"Then I will work my passage out," said the persistent wife; "and it strikes me I can do *that* better than you can, especially if I can get hold of my violin. I wish I had brought it away with me the other night."

"Well, you will never get it now. Would you not like me to do with you as the 'General' did with his wife, send you to my mother? She will love you for my sake."

"No—no—no!" cried Dot, vehemently. "I will never go again to other people's mothers. Why should I only be loved for other people's sake, and never—never for—my own? Oh, Robin."

"Dottie, dear, please don't cry so. I only thought you would be happier with my mother. It is a lovely place, and you might be very ill at sea. Fancy if you were to die at sea, and be sewn up in a sack, and tossed overboard."

"I should not fancy it at all," said Dot, with a fresh burst of tears.

"And it would break my heart to lose my precious little wife like that," said Rex, with some compunction of the horrible picture he had drawn; and kissing her fondly, he added, "Then we will go together, wife."

"I should run after you all over the world till I found you," said Dot, throwing her little arms round his neck.

"Why should we not go to your home together? That would be different; I should like it then, for I should be with you, and we should go arm-in-arm up to your father, just like that beautiful picture, where the prince introduces his bride to the king, saying,

" 'Sire, deign to look on me,
My lovely bride I bring to thee.' "

"So that is what you think of yourself, Mrs. Dot," said Rex, laughing. "Well, we will do all that by-and-bye. I can't go home now for many reasons, and I have to win the 'Victoria Cross' by saving lives. I must have more wonderful adventures, and——"

"Would you not save a life without winning that 'Victoria Cross' that you think such a lot about?" interrupted Dot, meditatively. "Did you only save my life for that, hubby dear?"

"No, indeed I didn't. I never did it to gain anything. I only thought of saving you from the bear; but a man loves adventures, and goes through them for patriotism, and for the glory of his country."

"And his own," added Dot, slyly.

"Perhaps, 'yes'" responded Rex. "For my country's glory and my own too. Hurrah!" Then he quickly subsided to a calm practical attitude.

"Look here, Dot," said he, taking out the little note-book

given him by Roy in the train, on their return from the docks, "I have every station down here, from this house to the Victoria Docks, and——"

"Is that where you go to win the 'Victoria Cross?'" asked his wife.

"No, you little donkey. That is where Roy's vessel starts from, and directly I know the day she goes we must start off. We must mind and be there before him. I know where to hide, and when we are out at sea we will come out of our hiding place, and they can't send us back then. I will tell the captain I will pay our passage by-and-bye, and that we will work it out, or some of it. But mind, we must be on board before Roy, or else he will see us going on. Won't we give him a surprise when least he expects it?"

And our hero and heroine went on with their plans and speculations, and went through a long voyage in ideality, until Roy came home, suddenly causing a great silence between the husband and wife, and little dreaming the subject of their interrupted conversation.

He threw himself into his arm-chair, and watched the children as they stood together at the window; and then Dot returned to the sofa. A sad look came over him. Then he rose with a sigh, pulled himself together, and took out his letter-book, then threw it down, and turned over his portmanteau, Rex watching.

"You are not going to pack up yet, are you, Roy?"

"I am packing by degrees. I merely want to take just what I need, and not what I am *likely* to want. The vessel is ready sooner than was anticipated. She leaves the docks Friday."

"You go so soon as Friday, Roy?" said Rex, slowly fixing his eyes on his friend.

"Oh, Mr. Royston, how soon!" followed Dot.

"I join the vessel at Gravesend on Saturday."

"How do you get there?"

"From New Cross."

"And do you go early in the morning?"

"No. I shall not go on board till late Saturday night. She sails at high tide—two o'clock Sunday morning."

Rex did not speak, but while Roy was saying what he meant to do, he stood close to where he was sitting; and now threw his arm round his neck—a sort of spasmodic clutch—that somewhat startled him, and his answer was to draw the boy very closely to him, as he glanced at his pale face and speaking eyes.

Roy was in a strange dilemma concerning him. So there was silence.

"Which would you like, old man?" said he at last, in a somewhat hesitating tone. "I should like to give up Friday to you. Shall your father come here to fetch you, or shall we go over to him?"

Roy was about to add "or shall I take you," but he knew that was slippery ground. After deep thought, he had come to the conclusion that it was not any use trying to deceive the boy; that he knew perfectly well that it was not likely he would sail for the West Indies without taking measures regarding him first; and besides, the strong feeling he entertained for him forbade his laying any trap to catch him.

Rex nearly twisted the buttons off his coat, but did not reply.

"Shall we both write to your father, Rob? I will say want to keep his dear boy to the last, and ask him which he would prefer—we go to him, or he come to us, late Friday or early Saturday. I shall not write until Thursday, so there will be plenty of time to write your letter. Give it me by the one o'clock post, and Sir Roland will get it that evening."

"Why should we both write?" asked Rex.

"As you have been staying with me, I must do so; and I thought you would wish it."

"I want to be with Dot and you. Let me help you, Roy. They had a letter from me, you know, only a few days ago, so there is not any necessity to bother again. If I think of anything important, I shall write, and if not, send yours alone; or, if you are too busy, I will write instead of you. Shall I?"

"Not on any account, Rob. It is only due to your father that I should do so."

"Rob!" said Dot, as he crossed over to the sofa. "What does Mr. Royston mean? He spoke of Sir Roland just now. Do you mean to say that is your father—a grand knight like in 'The Fatal Secret?'"

"I never said so. Roy said it."

Roy smiled as he overheard the stage whispers, but would not take any notice.

"When I have finished these letters, Rob," said he, "you shall help me with my portmanteau."

"Come along then, Dot, into the garden; and you whistle, Roy, when you are ready."

Rex led the way to his favourite bank, within earshot of the house. He had his "General" under his arm; but he was thinking too much to open it, and Dot sat and looked at him, with a fear that he was still contemplating sending her home to his mother. His first words, however, re-assured her, just as she was beginning to concoct a little plan on her own account, of running away and following her husband, go where he might—*coûte qui coûte*.

"I'm in a great fix, Dot. We ought to leave here Thursday."

"My foot will be quite ready by Thursday," interrupted Dot, springing up, and going round on her toes, by way of giving him an ocular demonstration of the fact.

"I'm not thinking of your foot, but of two other feet that will be rushing here in answer to Roy's letter, and running away with me."

"Let's go early Friday morning."

"It is too close a shave, Dot. Fancy, Mr. Young might get up early that very day, and yet, if we go on Thursday, we should have to go to the docks, and then they might not let us on board; or, if we waited till dark, we might lose our way, or you might get knocked down by the luggage."

"We might sleep at the 'Pig and Whistle,'" suggested Dot. "I know my way there—at least, I know London Bridge, and it's close there; but then, if we were to sleep there Thursday night, the Jumpers might turn in, and then it would be all up with us. I would sooner meet the bear—he would tell no tales."

"We can't go to the 'Pig and Whistle,' that's clear. Do you know any more hotels with 'aristocratic' names?" enquired Rex.

If it had not been for the visit of his father to that hotel of strange experiences, they would have slept there; but, after what he had heard from the cupboard, no doubt the landlady would telegraph to his father, or the bar-boy play some awful trick upon them both.

"I can't think of anything better than staying here till Friday, early morning, Dot. We must risk something. We can't go through great adventures for nothing. I have plenty of money for sleeping at an hotel. I thought we might leave here Thursday and sleep at Gravesend; but there might be lots of passengers doing the same thing, and they might ask all kinds of questions about us, and then it would not be kind to Roy. He would sit up all night, or be going off after us."

"Poor Mr. Royston. Yes, that he would," said Dot, "and he is a dear. He would go off to the 'Haunted House' and declare we were there."

"He would fight Jumper and the bear together to get us again," said Rex. "He would be in a funk. I can't do that, I love him too much. So let us wait till Friday morning."

"Why need we go before breakfast?" said Dot. "There is



THERE STOOD REX WAVING HIS CAP.

plenty of time afterwards. Mr. Royston does not go on board until Saturday night."

"But you forget he said he meant to give up Friday to us, and my father may write and say he will come over here."

"But won't your father be angry with you?"

"No. Perhaps—might not," hesitated Rex. "You see, he thought this the grandest life that ever was"—giving the "General" a great bang. "And he said, 'Go and do likewise,' and besides, I feel I am called, like Abraham, to leave my home and go just where I am sent."

"But Abraham was a great big man, and you are only a boy," suggested Dot.

"Father said I was older than my years," replied Rex. "And he also said, that when God called, you were to obey Him before parents."

"Then if He calls me from you, am I to run away?" asked Dot, with her little face all in puckers.

"Be quite sure first. Don't go without telling me," added her lord and master.

"Then would it not be best to wait and ask your father before *we* move on?" enquired she wistfully.

"You don't understand things, Dot," replied he impatiently, with his head thrown back with a great jerk, as if to get rid of some troublesome thoughts. "As I said before, I will, if you like, write a letter, and leave you in my father's care, just as the 'General' left his bride. He can take you with him if he comes Friday; but I thought you would like the adventure and the fun of the voyage."

"And so I do," said Dot, with big tears in her eyes, sorry that she had placed any "buts" and "ifs" in front of such a wonderful place of future enjoyment. "Promise me, Rob, you will never say that again?"

"All right, wife, we'll have jolly times together when once we are off," and Rex's eyes sparkled at the grand adventures that would attend the unfolding of his plans in the near

future, and Dot's shone like diamonds through her tears ; and then he took his note-book and wrote a sketch of their intended proceedings, according to a command of the "General."

"We must get our things ready by Thursday evening, while Roy is reading his letters and answering them. Friday morning we will go. Let us both write to Roy and the Youngs, and thank them, for they have been awfully good to us."

"I hope they will forgive us for 'ing," said Dot. "When we have a beautiful house of our own, we will ask them to stay with us, won't we?"

Friday morning came, and with it a letter from Sir Roland Radcliffe to Roy, in answer to his received on Thursday night.

Rex took it up to him, and watched Roy's face as he read it. Once it quivered, and then a smile passed over it.

"Your father is obliged to go to London this morning, Rob."

"He generally does go there Fridays," said the boy. "Are they all well?"

"He does not say to the contrary. He hopes to be here by the 3.10 train. Shall we go to the station and meet him, Rob? I fancy your mother will be coming as well, for he speaks of 'we,' and they want to see Dot."

"I don't mind their wanting to see me, so as they don't want to have me," said that young lady. "I do not intend ever to have any more 'mothers.'"

Rex said very little. He kept giving great grips to Roy's arm, who understood them perfectly, at least, he thought he did. He did not give Sir Roland's letter to his boy to read, and Rex wondered whether there was a promised caning in it. There was not any loving message evidently, or Roy would have given it; but the reason why he had not, lay in the P.S.—"He is not inclined to bolt again, is he?"

As far as Roy could see, the boy was clinging to him with a wistfulness, he could scarcely comprehend, and no wonder.

"I have promised to give this last morning to you children," said he. "We will go for a ramble in the woods."

Rex and Dot looked at each other; but that was all they could do. Their luggage was all ready behind an ivy-covered trunk of a tree near the gate. Dot's things were in a covered basket, given by Mrs. Young; while the "General" guarded his little captain's greatcoat, his small parcel of clothes, and his Testament.

It was a splendid September morning. Lovely autumn tints were already casting their rich hues on the trees; the blackberries were becoming quite ripe. But our hero and heroine took little note of that, as they scrambled after Roy through the wood that led to a high hill, commanding a splendid panorama of the surrounding country.

"Come out through this gap," said Roy. "We can see all over the farm from here."

"Oh, what a height we have come!" cried Dot. "How pretty it looks down there. Look, there is Mrs. Young among the peas and the beans."

"And there is Mr. Young," said Rex. "I believe he is going after that colt; I wish he would let me ride him. He is so jolly wild. I know I could tame him. I can do anything with my pony at home."

That last uttered word made Rex silent, then suddenly he asked,

"Roy, did they send any message to me—any love, or——?"

"No," replied Roy, hesitating as much as the boy. "I dare say they thought I had written without your knowing. Your father is not aware that we have become such allies, eh?"

His answer was a great grip at his arm—the arm that Rex was determined should save him from being thrashed. What a fearful humiliation before Do., his wife, Roy, and the Youngs.

His reverie was brought to a close by an exclamation from Roy.

"Halloa! What on earth is Young after?"

The farmer had mounted a haystack, and from its summit was pealing a large bell, while with his other hand he waved something.

"It's a letter!" cried Rex, hoping for a reprieve.

"It's a telegram," said Roy, starting up and taking a small whistle out of his pocket. He gave a peculiar call, at which the farmer threw down the bell and waved his hand. Chief, immediately imitated by the three on the heights, who then and there began their rapid descent home.

Roy could have gone down a steep decline, but would not leave the children. Rex could have followed him, but not Dot, and he would not have left her.

She had most of the talk to herself, for Rex feared that the telegram was from his father, announcing his immediate appearance; that he was coming by the next train, or asking Roy to go over with him directly. While Roy was perplexed as to how he could cut himself into three pieces, and be at the shipowners; with Sir Roland Radcliffe, and guard his son until his arrival, meeting him at the train—all these at the same time.

The telegram was from the shipowners, the grand masters of the *Victoria*, asking an important question, demanding his presence at the office to answer it. After some thought, he wired back the answer, adding that he had an urgent special appointment. Would be with the firm soon after five, or next morning. They were to wire back. In the meantime, there was a very early hasty dinner. Rex kept giving rapid glances at Roy, half afraid that he would vanish out of his sight for ever, through some means unknown for the present. Suddenly he remembered that this might be their last proper meal for ever so long, a fact he had the day before communicated to Dot, with an enjoiner to eat as much as she could. It was

rather a difficult matter. They were both affectionate children, and though from different motives, they imagined they were driven on by force of circumstances; they keenly felt leaving a roof where they had been so sheltered and lived. Dot longed to throw her arms round Mr. and Mrs. Young, and thank them once again for saving her from being re-captured by the "Haunted House."

After dinner, Roy proposed going down to the station to meet his telegram from the post-office.

"Now or never," thought Rex. He invariably took his great-coat, and his "General" with him, on account of the former being his banker, and the latter his ever-needed referee, that it would not look remarkable, especially as he was expecting his father.

Roy hurried on, looking back after the children, who had followed their host and hostess into the cornfield. They were both sorry that the boy was to leave them; his engaging manners, the mixture of fun in his brave adventurous spirit, with the extraordinary gleams of maturer thought flashing out when least expected, buds and flowers of the fruit of riper years, had won for him a warm place in their hearts, where Dot and he reigned together. But she, so said the couple, should never leave them until her own mother—and a worthy one she must be—was found. So the little one's parting hug Mrs. Young took for her undefined grief at saying farewell to her playfellow, who had saved her from so much, and so often.

Dot could not have explained why she was sad. She did not stop, of course, to analyse that strange feeling creeping over her, that she was rushing from safety into danger—from a happy home and tender care, to follow the fortunes of a boy not much older than herself, though he appeared so in years. She was to sail with him o'er life's tempestuous sea like the dove out of the ark—no resting-place for the sole of her little feet. If she had been questioned, she would have said her

great fear was that Rex would be captured after all by his father, and she would be torn from her dearly-loved little husband.

Roy waved to them as he neared the post-office, and saw them running after him.

"We must be careful how we take our tickets," said Rex. "They will be asking where we have gone."

"Let us take it to Motley, where we were married," suggested Dot.

"No; that will be too near. If the man said I had taken a ticket there, Roy would telegraph, and we might be taken while waiting for the New Cross train. I'm not going to be treated like a lost dog, and get a caning at the end," he said to himself.

Roy had been presented with a telegram, which was just on its way to him. He was devouring it, when he called to Rex.

"Rob! The boy has gone. I wanted him, just to ask if the 'special messenger' is in. You stay here, Dot," and Roy despatched another telegram.

But Rex had not returned, so he and Dot went into the station. They saw him on the other side, waving his cap, and looking very inclined to cross the line.

"Come round," shouted Roy.

There was a great crowd every now and then, for it was high market day at Motley, and when Rex came scampering up the stairs, it was to say that the "special messenger" had been sent there, but would be back by the train due in a few minutes.

As they went back to the post-office, Rex exclaiming to Dot with glee,

"It's jolly. I've done it splendidly!"

"What have you done?"

"Why, got the tickets—ours I mean. While I was waiting, there was a bunch of people getting all sorts, and a kind

woman, who was jammed in between another and a fat man, said, 'My dear, you will never get in this side the barrier until the train has gone. What do you want?' I was just going to say not anything, when it came like a great flash into my mind, 'Let her get a ticket!' So I said, 'One third to New Cross!' 'Why,' she said, 'You bit of a boy will only be half!' So I said, 'No, no, I want a grown-up ticket!' 'Oh,' she said, 'for some one else is it? All right, I'll get it!' And so she did, and the train will be in at two o'clock!"

"How did you pay?"

"I paid the woman. It was only a shilling, and the one ticket does for both, and nobody will know how we went. My sister and I always have one ticket between us, so I understand. I should have preferred first-class, but I thought in bed this morning it was safer to say third."

At this instant Roy came back with a letter, and at the same time the station-master beckoned him from the other side.

"You can run across, sir, look sharp. Not the children."

Telling them to stay there, he ran across, and the train from Motley, with the expected messenger, steamed into the station on Roy's side of course.

A lady and gentleman were waving from the window. Rex's heart jumped into his mouth and down again, and then seemed to stop beating, while all the blood rushed to his face.

They were his father and mother!

He took off his hat and waved it back again.

"Don't come too near the edge, Rex, you will fall over," cried his mother.

"Stay where you are," called Sir Roland. "We shall be with you in a moment."

Another lady came forward and looked earnestly, eagerly at Dot.

"Is that lovely child 'Dot?'" she exclaimed.

"Now then—London!" called the porters on Rex's platform.

"New Cross! London Bridge!"

"Who are those people waving?" asked Dot. "Is it your father come by an earlier train? Will you wait to see them? This is our train."

"Yes," said Rex. "Come on—quick," and running to the extreme end of the train, where there was an open door, with not any porter to see or close it, they scrambled in, *and at each end of the station went out the up and down trains.*

Roy was speaking to the "special messenger," who had sprung out of the train before it stopped, when a party alighted from a first-class carriage—two ladies and two gentlemen, one of whom he recognized as the gentleman he saw in the coffee-room at the hotel, and whom he afterwards discovered to be Sir Roland Radcliffe.

"Was that 'Dot' with Rex? Oh, let us make haste!" was the remark he overheard. Yes, that must be the party come by another train.

Going up to them, Roy raised his hat.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing Sir Roland Radcliffe?"

"Yes," said the baronet, "I am he, and surely I am shaking hands with the grandson of my father's old friend, General Royston?"

For a moment Roy's face flushed and then turned pale; but at the mention of "grandson" he brightened up, and warmly acknowledged the relationship.

"I guessed it directly I saw your signature. I wish you had placed it at the end of your first letter, and my wife's mind would have been entirely relieved as to the safety of our truant son and heir."

"Come over and see him," said Roy. "I had to spring over here just as the train came in. The station-master beckoned me to meet the 'special messenger,' for I was summoned to London on important business; but I am sending a

'special' with a letter of explanation, which I trust will suffice. And, now that I can lodge your boy safely into your own hands, I can follow my letter."

"No, no. We want you back to dinner at Radcliffe Hall."

"Yes, certainly," chimed in Lady Radcliffe. "You must come. Rex will make you. How well he looks."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes; as our train came in we caught sight of him, waving his hat in a frantic state, looking splendid. How impatient he must be for that train to go on. There's ours moving off."

"Was that 'Dot' standing near him?" enquired Mrs. Desmond, anxiously.

"Oh! He has told you about Dot, I see. She is a lovely, interesting child," said Roy.

"There go both the trains," said the Colonel. "Which side do we go out?"

"The other, I expect," said Sir Roland. "I called out to Rex to stay where he was. I thought, in his eagerness, he would be crossing the line."

"The station-master had forbidden him," said Roy.

"Where has he gone? I cannot see him," said Lady Roland.

"I expect his patience has been taxed a little too far. They are running down the subway," said Roy. "We shall meet them. Those two children are like eels."

The party went down the stairs and round, but not anything was seen of them; and when they ascended the opposite platform, it was nearly deserted.

"They are hiding," said Lady Roland. "Rex can never keep quiet five minutes without being up to something."

The refreshment and waiting rooms were searched in vain.

Roy darted out of the station and looked down the road.

with a strange fear creeping over him. Oh, that he could see the faintest sign of them, however far off.

"Looking for the two children, sir?" enquired the station-master. "They were both on this platform when the two trains were in."

"Yes," said a porter, "I saw the young gentleman waving. I dare say they are playing you one of their tricks, sir. I'll look on the roof of the station——"

"Roof!" interrupted Mrs. Desmond. "Fancy, Dot getting up there!"

"Not unlikely, lady. I found them both the other day on the roof of one of them carriages shunted yonder. How in the world they got up I don't know, unless by a broken ladder near by."

Sir Roland called "Rex! Rex!" several times in different directions; while Roy, with a strange apprehension of evil, enquired if the gentry at the "Haunted House" had been seen at the station.

"Very likely, sir. They are always coming and going; but being market day, they might not be noticed particularly. Have you asked, sir, if any children's tickets were taken—halves? Because the other day the youngsters went to Motley."

"Motley! what for? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, I noticed them. Perhaps they have done the same to-day."

Upon enquiries, not any half-tickets had been taken at that platform; and on the other, only one for a little girl about five, well-known.

"It is not likely that they would have gone to Motley," said Sir Roland and his wife. "Rex looked too delighted to see us for that. I believe they have gone back to your quarters for something. We shall find them there."

Roy could only fervently hope it, but looked so grave, that they grew alarmed; and then he told them all about the

"Haunted House," and how Rex had been stolen, and Dot re-taker.

"That wonderful 'Dot.' Is there not anything that can lead to her identity?" cried Mrs. Desmond.

"There is, indeed," replied Roy, struck by her eagerness.
"A lock of white hair"

CHAPTER XI

OUT AT SEA.

AS the train moved out of the station Rex tried to catch a glimpse of his parents, but he could not manage it; and to put his head even a little out of the window would be too great a risk. So, throwing himself full length on the seat, he folded his arms and buried his head on them, Dot watching him intently, rather afraid to speak, until she heard great sobs, his frame shaking with their vehemence. This was entirely a new stage in her experience of her husband. She had never seen him cry; thought he scorned tears, that they were only fit for girls and babies like dolls. She little thought how often he had been near it; how they had risen in his heart, when waves of home memories passed over.

She jumped down, and threw her arms round him.

"Oh, Robin, what is the matter?"

He did not speak.

"Tell me, Rob. What is it?"

He only sobbed the more.

Dot grew frightened.

"If you will not speak to me I shall stop the train, and then you will have to say what is the matter," and suiting the action to the word, Dot sprang up on the seat and tapped against the glass, as a warning that she meant what she said.

"You must not touch that communicator," cried Rex, jumping up in a fright. "It is a penalty of £20 if you break the glass and stop the train for nothing."

"It isn't nothing," replied Dot. "You would never cry for nothing," and jumping down once more, she put her arms round his neck. "Oh, Robin."

"Wife, dear, it is just nothing. I did so long to give my parents a hug, but I dared not; and I may be drowned, or die at sea."

"Why not have gone over and given them a hug? We could have gone by the next train," said Dot.

"Not so easy as you think. They would never have parted with me again so soon. Father said 'God was to come before parents,' and the 'General' writes that 'feelings must never come in the way of a soldier's duty.'"

"Yes, I dare say not; but why not have waited till you *are* a soldier?" said Dot.

"You do not understand," replied Rex, shaking his head at her puzzled countenance. "I am a soldier in a certain way. Like Abraham, I have left my home at a higher call, and I must go just as the 'General' did."

"I wonder if you are right?" meditated Dot, looking into his eyes, from which the sadness was departing and the fire returning; and she endeavoured to weigh the balance of right and wrong in her own mind, as to whether God had called her clever, brave husband to leave his parents on the other side of the station, looking for him in every direction, and Roy doing the same, just as he was starting for the ship, and must be so busy. "Poor Mr. Royston, what will he think? How they will worry about us," uttered she, half to herself.

"We shall soon see Roy, and I am going to write home," said Rex, "so it will be all right. Hurrah for the sea!"

But it was not a very spirited "hurrah," and their talk of the voyage that was so near was not very animated, and they were glad when New Cross was reached and they got out and changed for Gravesend, where their spirits were speedily restored by the confusion reigning around—bewildering and subduing to grown-up folks, but highly exhilarating to their

olive branches, who, like puppies, the greater the excitement the more interest is their happiness.

"Can that really be Mr. Royston's ship?" asked Dot, looking up at it as if she were gazing at St. Paul's from the summit of Ludgate Hill. However are we to get up there? Is that immense thing really the great grandmother of the dear little vessel in his room that he was always measuring with white tape?"

Yes, that was the *Victoria*, one of the grandest vessels that ever left the mouth of the Thames, measuring over three hundred feet from stem to stern, and in that space was crammed the luxury of Park Lane and all the conveniences of the Grand Hotel.

She was a splendid thing to look upon, and it was not only Dot who opened her eyes in wonder at her visible and invisible riches, for her freight of costly merchandise had been conveyed to the hold at the docks.

It was the remainder of the passengers and their luggage who were creating so much confusion and delay, and at which the steamer was puffing out occasional snorts of discontent, being anxious to take her first step into that great unknown ocean, of which she had heard so much during her months of preparation in the docks.

The captain came on for a few minutes, talked to the pilot, and off again; but had not any intention of joining his vessel until off Deal.

"We will wait until a heap of people go on," said Rex. "Mind you do not look as if you belonged to nobody."

"No. I'll look as if I belonged to somebody," said Dot.

A gentleman, his wife, and two daughters, were embarking, so the two children followed in their wake, holding themselves erect, endeavouring to look as if fully accustomed to take long voyages. Fortunately for them they were carrying their belongings, so were permitted to pass. At the foot of the stairs of the *Victoria* there was a pause.

"Are these your children?" asked a man with a gold band to his cap.

"No," said the gentleman, "only two grown-ups."

"What is your name?" asked the man, addressing Rex.

"Who is your party?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rover," was the quick answer.

"All right," cried an officer on the top of the stairs, catching the last name. "The children of Captain Drover," and he placed a mark on the list he held in his hand.

The hearts of our hero and heroine gave a leap of joy at the mistake, and finding themselves at last on board in safety. Everybody was too busy to attend to them—far too occupied with their own affairs, so they had plenty of time to take a general survey of that "palace on the water."

"I will show you a nice place where we can hide," said Rex.

But he had great difficulty in discovering the nook behind the doctor's cabin; it looked so different now.

"What will Mr. Royston say when he sees us?" said Pot.

"He will be in a great wax, I know."

"We must not let him see us until we are right out at sea," replied Rex.

"Is your father on board?" asked the stewardess, coming up to them some time after.

"No," said Rex.

"Then you had better come and put your things in the cabin and have some tea, and by that time, he will be back again I suppose," and she led the way to a small cabin, from the window of which the quay could be plainly seen, and all that was going on thereat.

It was too early to watch for Roy; but they would have liked to examine the cabin they were in, with all its wonderful contrivances, and how everything seemed fastened to the walls. They were neither of them in any hurry to go to tea amongst a lot of people, who might ask them questions. If they

might only have tea by themselves, where they were. No, that was out of the question ; but they might return as soon as they liked, and watch for their father.

Fortunately they were seated amongst a party of very young children, and, as all things were sixes and sevens, and people too anxious to get settled down before they were out at sea to think of anything or anybody but themselves, they attracted but little notice. They made a good tea and hurried back to the cabin, encountering the stewardess *en route*.

"My dears, tell your father, if you see him first, that the cabin was arranged after all as he wished. Your berth, missy, is in the little inner cabin behind the curtain. He may not be back until quite late, so you had better not sit up for him. There is a tin of biscuits, so you have them whenever you like."

"I wish Roy were coming to-night," said Rex, when they were again alone. "Then we should be soon out at sea."

"He won't be here till the last moment," said Dot. "He is looking for us—your father and all of them."

"If Roy were not there, I would write to my father ; but, you see, they would all be down upon us. The first vessel they speak to, after we leave Southampton, shall take a letter from me. You write one too, Dot. I am so afraid of running against that sailor I told you of, when I came down with Roy. He will be telling him, or letting him know, by saying something—that I am here."

Rex watched all the sailors till he saw the jovial face of Fag. How he longed to run after him ; hear some of his adventures, and introduce him to Dot.

"Do you think that they think Mr. Royston is our father?" said Dot at night, suddenly pulling aside her curtain, and interrupting Rex in a tangled skein of thought as to the doings of three people he so dearly loved—father, mother, and Roy.

There were a great many hard knots in the skein, and he knew that they were all of his own creation. He was trying to go to sleep with the thought of how many lives he could save at sea; but others rose as grim spectres, and would not let him close his eyes for long.

"I do not know," replied he, "but they evidently think we belong to somebody we don't."

"I fancy it must be the gentleman this cabin belongs to," said Dot, reflectively; "for when you said 'Mr. and Mrs. Rover,' the gentleman, with gold lace on him, sang out, 'All right—Captain Drover,' or something like it; and that is the name on the two cases and those bags."

"Yes," said Rex. "Mind, we must not touch any of his things."

At this moment the stewardess came in.

"You ought to be asleep, you two. I hope you are not afraid of being alone in the dark, for I must turn out the light. None are allowed after 10 p.m."

"Afraid!" cried Rex, "what at? We are not alone."

"Oh; has the captain come?"

"No. But we have each other—that's enough."

"Why, you must have wanted some things out of those bags," said the woman. "Have you the keys?"

"No," said Rex. "We should not think of touching those bags. They are not ours."

"Well, I am sure your papa will think you are very good children."

"When will the steamer leave Gravesend?" enquired Rex, with a quick jerk of his head, ending with a shake, in impatient dismissal of an unpleasant thought. "It will be Sunday morning early, will it not?"

"No, to-morrow morning—10 o'clock."

"Saturday morning?" cried the children.

"Oh," said Rex, "and he said he should not come on board until Saturday night, as it would not start till Sunday."

"What will he do?" cried Dot. "Can he take a boat and run after it?"

"Not exactly," laughed the stewardess. "You need not fidget, your pa will be telegraphed to that he must look sharp and come on board, as she is sailing right off quick, and I guess he'll be off like a shot, wherever he is."

"Poor Mr. Royston," said Dot, with her head still out of the curtain after the stewardess had left them. "Dear Mr. Royston. Fancy if the vessel goes without him!"

"Dear old Roy," chimed in Rex. "I wish I could send him a telegram on my own account; but the owners are sure to do so, and——"

"But fancy if we are left here without him," interrupted Dot. "Don't you think we had better get up very early and go back?"

"Go back!" cried Rex, springing up in bed, though Dot could not see him. "Go back! No—never. The 'General' says, 'Never draw a line of march and then go zig-zag because a large stone comes in the way;' that is like 'putting your hand to the plough and looking back,' as it says in the Bible, you know."

"Yes," said Dot, with a random shot; "and we might be turned into a pillar of salt, like Lot's wife. That would be dreadful."

Rex, failing to see any guiding or comforting connection in the suggestion, composed himself to sleep, and dreamt that Roy never received any telegram, and finding the steamer gone, rode after it on his tricycle. That he and Dot watched him in agony coming over the waves, when suddenly one swept right over him, and they thought he was drowned; but he had, instead, been taken prisoner by a torpedo boat, whose captain turned into Jumper, who took them all prisoners, and conveyed them in his boat to the "Haunted House." He was so delighted to find himself safe on the grand *Victoria* when he awoke, and with the hope of seeing Roy that

very day, that he was quite in high spirits, and nearly ran after the sailor, Fag, to make himself known to him and hear some of his wonderful adventures; but fortunately the man was called away.

Outside their state cabin the greatest confusion reigned, what Rex termed "a jolly row," and he longed to be in the midst of it. They did now and then venture out into the crowd and watch the arrival of those sort of people who you see flying down a platform just as the bell is ringing and the guard is holding out his green flag of departure. Several of these happy families were arriving, looking tired and snappy under the oft-repeated "I told you how it would be" of the husband.

A troop of variously-aged children were scrambling up the gangway with perishable articles, such as dolls, fluffy monkeys with long tails and only one eye, jealously guarded by its mamma of six, who was followed by another of ten, carrying a parrot's cage with great difficulty, as its occupant was also excited by being late, and was imitating the screechings of the engines to perfection. They watched in vain for Roy; but the last moment came and he had not arrived. They saw a little boat making signs, and surely the occupants were trying to gain upon the vessel; but it was no use, of no avail to signal. The pilot raised his arm, and in less than five minutes the majestic *Victoria* was sailing proudly out of the mouth of the Thames, as if she knew that she was the very latest development of modern ship-building, even to the electric light.

They were within sight of Southampton much sooner than was expected, owing to her extraordinary speed.

Dinner that day was hurried. Many expected friends, passengers who had failed to put in an appearance at Gravesend. Though the party at the children's dinner was greatly increased, Rex and Dot were not molested, their next-door neighbours and their *vis-à-vis* being too occupied, seeing

how many "courses" they could get handed to them during that meal, and how much they could eat out of them.

The steamer arrived at the quay just as they had finished, and there was a rush upstairs. Rex and Dot followed, and found a hiding place near the starboard bulwark, where they could watch to the last every passenger who came on board. Their hearts were sinking with apprehension when an hour passed and not a sign of Roy. Often they thought they saw him in the distance, but the near view dissolved into someone else.

"There is a wrapper and portmanteau like Mr. Royston's; but that gentleman who is holding it is much older," said Dot.

"Yes," said Rex. "Roy would have sprang up here three stairs at a time."

The passenger came nearer.

Rex and Dot clasped each other's hands with a cry of dismay, and, "It is Mr. Royston!" "It is Roy," fell from their lips.

Was it possible that that haggard-looking man, more like forty than twenty, could be Roy, deathly white and moving slowly, as if in pain? What with delight at seeing him and fright at his appearance, they both started to make a rush at him, and then dragged each other back.

"He might be very angry and give us up. He would insist upon landing and sending us up to London in care of the guard, like two lost dogs," said Rex.

They must stay where they were till right out at sea. But, oh, if they could only know why he looked so ill. Was it with looking for them? Though at rest as to his presence on the *Victoria*, Rex was dejected, and so Dot followed suit. Just as the vessel was getting up steam, and the gangway closed, they crept off to their cabin in great fear of coming across Roy, or finding Captain Drover installed in their, or rather in his own quarters, with his two children behind the curtain in Dot's cosy nest.

They were greatly surprised to find the cabin empty, and instead of being strowed with extra luggage, it had evidently been left quite undisturbed, except that there was a supply of milk and biscuits.

They betook themselves to Dot's little cabin behind the curtains, where there were two berths, and there they sat and speculated as to Roy's condition, and how soon they might be discovered. In the meantime the captain was standing on the bridge, talking to Roy and the chief officer.

"Let me advise you to go at once to rest, Mr. Royston. Give me the remainder of your instructions to-morrow after you have slept off that nightmare and fatigue."

Then, as Roy turned to leave, he heard him say to the other,

"This is a sad telegram, Mr. Loftus. Captain Drover has died suddenly. It was only the day before yesterday that I was talking with him. He seemed in the best health and spirits. Some of his luggage is on board—poor fellow." Here the captain caught sight of something or somebody he wanted, and quickly quitted the bridge.

The next day the sea had begun to affect many of the passengers.

Dot had been ill all night, and now Rex, fight against it as he might, was constrained to throw himself again in his berth when he was nearly dressed. They were both lying there very still, when a gentleman in full uniform entered the cabin, and their hearts sunk at the sight.

Dot fixed her large blue eyes upon him. Rex did not think the dreaded moment would come so soon. He had concluded the owner of the cabin would not make his appearance on board after the vessel had started. He shut his eyes, hoping the grand-looking man would not speak to him. Then he thought it mean to pretend to be asleep, and wished they had hidden in the nook behind the doctor's cabin. Well, he must face the danger, so he opened his eyes again,

fixing them enquiringly on their visitor, and wider at his opening words.

"My dear children. I have only just heard, through the steward, that you were on board. It was supposed that you had landed at Gravesend or Southampton, and gone home. I am the captain of the *Victoria*."

The two little hearts went down to zero. The fatal moment of their discovery had come. Dot wondered whether he would throw them overboard as useless cargo, as she had seen acted; and Rex speculated as to whether he might cast them adrift in a little boat, with only a keg of biscuits and water for a punishment, as he had read about.

"I am sorry to tell you, my boy, that your father is—was taken suddenly ill yesterday," said the captain slowly.

Rex's eyes grew very dark, and a perplexed, anxious look came over his face.

"What makes you think so?" asked he. "How do you know?"

"I had a telegram brought me by the last passenger who came on board by special boat, and——"

Rex started up in his berth. That last passenger was Roy. He remembered now seeing a yellow envelope in his hand. That was the telegram to say his father was ill. But how did they know they were there? It was all a mystery.

"May I see the telegram?" faltered Rex, feeling as if the cabin were going round and round. "Is he very ill? Could we not have gone back in the boat?"

"I did not even know you were here, or I might have delayed the vessel a few minutes, if possible, to have sent you home. Strange that you were not mentioned in the telegram. I would have brought it you to see, but the wind caught it from my hand and blew it overboard."

"Do we not stop anywhere else, where we could get out?" asked Dot, sorrowfully, looking at Rex.

"No, my dear little girl. We are too far out at sea for that. We will try and make you as happy as we can. Lie down, my boy."

Rex, with everything swimming before him, clutched at the curtain of his berth, and then buried his head in the pillow with a low sob at the few parting words of Captain Paton, as he left them.

"Oh, father—father!" cried Rex, after he had closed the door. "What have I done? Have I made you ill?"

Dot tried to get to him, but was too ill. And so the long day passed, varied by visits from the stewardess, with grapes and lemonade; and one or two ladies came in and petted them, calling them "poor dear children," and then went on deck to say what a lovely pair they were, with their expressive eyes; how patient and good they seemed, and how dreadful to have to tell them that their father was dead.

"How is Mr. Royston?" enquired the captain of the doctor next day.

"Very ill indeed. I wish his were a quieter berth."

The captain thought a minute.

"You had better let him be removed to the one Captain Drover was to have occupied—poor fellow. The machinery will not disturb him half so much there. It is away, too, from Colonel Moore's cabin, and that regiment of noisy children. I never knew such a disorderly crew in all my life."

"You are right there. I should like those boys to be under training of a man-of-war for three years," said the doctor. They are bad enough when well; but now they are ill, it is like a small lunatic asylum, rendered infinitely worse by their ignorant, foolish mother, and stupid Ayah. Those children will be ill much longer than Mrs. Elain's in the opposite cabin, whose youngsters are properly trained. Whatever I order is done, and they will soon be well and playing on deck. I'll move Royston at once away from that row, or he will have brain fever."

"Do," said the captain, "and just have a look at those two young 'Drovers.' They appear quiet interesting children. Come of a different stock to the other crew. Better not allude to the father."

The doctor nodded and disappeared.

That evening, when Rex and Dot awoke from rather a long sleep, they found some jelly and lemonade at their side, and the doctor looking at them through the curtain. Dot smiled at him. She thought what a kind face he had in the morning when they first saw him; and he had given them a draught, which had made them feel better, and had sent them to sleep.

"That's right," said he. "Now you will do. I have a patient here, who is very ill. I'm sure you will be quiet, and not make a row talking."

"We won't talk at all," said Dot, "If she is so ill. Can I do anything for her?"

"No, thank you, my kind little girl. You must get well yourself first; and this is a gentleman who is so ill, and——"

"I'll get well as soon as I can," said Rex, "and I'll help you nurse him. You must have an awful lot to do, if everybody is ill on board."

The doctor gave a little laugh.

"You keep where you are till I order you up. However well you may feel in the morning, you are not to move until I see you."

Rex felt too unhappy to talk loud or laugh, so the doctor had a better opinion of them than he had of any children on board. They whispered together, wishing there were some wonderful sea-post or telephone, by which he could hear how his father was.

"Oh! if there were only a phonograph through which I could hear his voice once more."

"Whatever is that?" said Dot, raising herself up in her berth, and looking across, much puzzled.

"A little instrument that speaks with the voice last spoken into it."

"I think I should be frightened at it," meditated Dot. "Fancy opening it and suddenly hearing Jumper's voice, or the bear's. I would rather be drowned. What's that voice?"

They both listened. It was groans proceeding from the outer cabin.

"It is the gentleman who is so ill. I suppose he is in pain—poor man."

Now and then there was a little laugh, then more moans, then a low talking, afterwards quiet, and the children went to sleep. They were awakened many hours after by more moans, then a movement in the other cabin, and a fall.

They both sat up.

"Whatever is it?" said Dot.

"I believe it is the gentleman fallen down. I shall go and see if there is anyone to help him in a minute," said Rex.

They listened for some time. Then Rex jumped up, and looked through the curtain. The moon was shining brilliantly, and he saw the figure of a man in a long dressing-gown, lying on the floor.

"Are you ill? Can I help you?"

There was not any answer.

"Oh, don't go in," said Dot. "You may be hurt, or something. You do not know him."

"I may save his life. I must go, whether I like it or not," said Rex, and he stepped bravely into the room. Then he started and gave a cry:

"Dot! Dot! come here! It is Roy!"

Dot tumbled out of her berth, and the next instant they were kneeling together by the unconscious form of Frank Royston, who had evidently got out of his berth to obtain some *eau de Cologne* out of his portmanteau, for it had just slipped from his hand, as he fell between it and his bed.

"Roy! Roy! speak!" cried Rex.

"Mr. Royston dear—speak," said Dot.

Then they applied *eau de Cologne*; but to no purpose.

"I shall go and fetch the doctor," said Rex; "but mind, do not let him see that we know him, and if he wakes up, ask him not to split on us," added he, as he vanished out of the cabin.

Dot was frightened; but she would not leave her post. She did not like her brave little husband to think her a coward. She continued bathing his head with *eau de Cologne*, fearing his face was becoming whiter. "Was he dead? the dear, kind Mr. Royston, whom Rex so loved, and who had been so kind to them both?" By way of comforting herself, she thought how much more dreadful it would have been to be left alone with the bear.

Rex, in the meantime, had been stopped by a gentleman, and told to go off to bed. Then he tumbled over a sail, and found it was a sailor curled up inside, and who ordered him to stop that "larking" in not very polite language, which the boy translated into seafaring parlance, and hurried on, trying to remember the steps and turnings which had been so attractive to him, but all looked different in the moonlight. He was startled suddenly by a quick word of command from the "watch," "No children allowed on deck in the night," to be off instantly to his cabin; but upon stating that he was in quest of the doctor for a serious case, the officer changed his tone, and directed him. Dr. Cook was greatly surprised to see who was his visitor. Praised him for being so thoughtful, and told him to hurry back as fast as he could, as it was dangerous for him to be on deck with so little clothing on at that time of night. He said afterwards that it was one of the prettiest pictures he had seen for a long time. The two children had managed to raise the head of Mr. Royston into Dot's lap, and when he entered the cabin, she was bathing his head with her own little handkerchief; while Rex was

applying strong smelling salts, left by the doctor, who, with the help of the steward, carried his patient back to his berth.

"Go on with these restoratives, little nurse," said he to Dot, "while I get some ice."

He was absent longer than he expected.

"I have been trying to find some one to sit up with Mr. Royston ; but the stewards and stewardess are being run off their legs, and he must have continual watching."

"Please let us do it," said Rex. "We won't leave him for a minute."

"No, we won't, not for a minute," repeated Dot. "Tell us what you want done, and we will do it, we promise."

"I quite believe you," said he ; "but I cannot put an old head on young shoulders."

"Yes, you can," interrupted Rex. "The 'General' says, 'If you want a thing done, do it yourself ; and if you can't, write it down, and get the next best person to do it.' Now I am the next best, for there does not seem anybody else ; so write down, and I will carry out your wishes."

"Yes, we will both carry out your orders," chimed in Dot.

A peculiar amused look crossed the face of the medical man.

"Go through the swing-door nearly opposite this," said he, "and ask the steward to bring a hot bottle at once."

Rex disappeared, and in a few moments returned with it in his arms.

"That's right," said the doctor, placing it at his patient's feet. "Now, little nurse, see that it remains where I have placed it ; and you, my boy, attend to this ice-bag, and keep it to his head."

Dr. Cook left the cabin, but presently returned with something in a tumbler in one hand, and a "Bee" clock in the other.

"Every ten minutes moisten his lips with this mixture.

See how I do it," added he, administering a few drops, when, to his surprise, Roy opened his eyes.

The children did not move, though Dot did try to hide behind the doctor.

"Where am I?" cried Roy, starting up. "Am I dead or alive? Where have you come from, children? Are you dead? Were you killed in that train? Rob—speak!"

Rex gave a frightened look at Dot, and another at the doctor.

"Humour him; agree in whatever he says," said he. "The mind is a little wandering, that's all. Nothing to be alarmed about. Say you are alive."

The order had not to be repeated. Rex flew to his side. Mr. Royston had closed his eyes, murmuring,

"Yes, they are dead, and are killing everyone else. No—their father is dead—your children—Sir Roland. Ah—poor things—but this—this boy. Yes, their father is dead—his father to die thus. Now they are dead."

"No, we are not," said Rex, grasping his hand, but with a cold, aching feeling at his heart that his father might be.

"Did Mr. Royston know your father?" enquired the doctor.

"Yes," faltered Rex.

"Then I suppose he brought the news of your father's death?"

"Is it really true?"

"I fear so, my boy; but you will hear particulars when he comes to himself. Hope on, there may be a mistake," added he, as Rex fixed his eyes first on him and then on Roy, with a dazed, stunned expression, giving a convulsive grasp of his hand, that made Roy open his eyes again.

"It is—it is you! I hear you speak! Yes, you are alive! But why here? Can it be? Am I on board? Oh, God, I thank Thee that they live!" and he sank back in a dead faint.

Dot replaced the hot bottle, from which Roy had moved ; and Rex lowered the ice-bag at his head, and then he sank down on his knees and sobbed until Dot came and knelt by him, putting her arms round his neck, and telling him she was sure there was some mistake ; that he was quite well the other day, so why should he be dead now.

"That is nothing," groaned Rex. "People are alive one day and dead the next."

"Do you mean perhaps you killed him running away?"

"Oh, don't tell me I have done anything so dreadful," cried Rex, with a fresh burst of tears. "Wife, do not be so cruel."

"I only want to comfort you, Robin."

Seeing that she made him more miserable, Dot clasped her little hands, and said,

"Dear Father—God, please comfort Robin, for I only make him worse. May it not be true about his father being dead. May he be alive ; and, oh, please forgive Rob if he has done wrong in coming away without leave. Make Mr. Royston quite well again, very soon, for we both love him."

Roy moved, and the children rose to their feet ; but not before Rex had given Dot a silent hug for her unexpected prayer. Then he took the spoon and moistened the lips of their patient. His eye quivered, and he gave a slight smile.

"When he opens his eyes, ask him about your father," whispered Dot.

"No ; we must not speak till the doctor comes back. You have prayed, wife, that is enough, especially if I have killed him," added Rex, with a sob.

Then Dr. Cook came in just to look, and was surprised at his patient being able to take so much of his mixture, and gave something stronger, and said that Mr. Royston was in a quiet sleep. So he continued to rest peacefully until the eastern horizon was flooded with light, and golden rays shot through the cabin window, glinting on Dot's golden hair, as she lay fast asleep, her head resting on the hot bottle ; but

it failed to give any light to Rex's white face and grief-stricken eyes, with their black rims.

When the doctor paid his early visit, it was to declare his patient wonderfully better ; that Rex could remain and attend to him, but was to go to sleep at once in a berth in the same cabin, which would be his for the remainder of the voyage ; and he placed Dot in her own to have proper rest.

Rex could neither eat or sleep until late in the afternoon, when Dot appeared quite refreshed from her long sleep, and a short blow on deck, where she did not care to be without Rex, though the same lady, who had paid them a visit down in their cabin, was very kind to her ; but she asked questions which Dot found it difficult to parry, so she soon went down to Rex, who was sitting watching Roy having such a quiet sleep, that sometimes he put his head down to ascertain if he were alive or not. Sometimes he murmured, "It is not true. No ; who said so ?"

Rex had refused all solicitations to go upstairs ; said the waves made him ill, and pleaded so earnestly to remain at his watch, that Dr. Cook consented.

It was a lovely evening. The window was open, and a beautiful breeze was wafted in with the aroma from the sea. There was a concert on the upper deck, and the plaintive air of "Home, sweet Home," was carried in too. How it entered Rex's heart. How often it had been sung on those happy Sunday evenings. He fancied he could hear his mother's voice, and his father's ; but that made him bury his head on Roy's bed, and again little Dot came and knelt by his side, and prayed her simple, touching prayer. At its conclusion they were a little startled by a hand on their heads, and a low voice saying,

"Amen. Thy prayer is answered. Thy father lives. Yes, Rob ; it is true."

They sprang up. Roy's eyes were wide open, and he was smiling upon them.

"Who told you otherwise? Why do you both think he is dead?"

Then they told him; and how they came to be there. How Rex was seized with the desire to be with him, in hopes of winning the "Victoria Cross," and saving lives; and all they had gone through to accomplish their plans.

"Oh, Rob! Rob!" cried Roy, in a slow, sad tone. "Instead of winning the 'Victoria Cross,' you have made yourself a cross to others, and perhaps a terrible one. Instead of saving life, you have taken great pains to destroy it. How could you go off as you did at the station, before the very eyes of your mother and father? They thought you might have gone the other way for some reason. There was an accident to that very train—a man and woman injured, and two children killed, or carried away in a dying state. To this day it may not be known that it was not you and Dot. Then it was supposed that the Jumpers had stolen you again, and we went up to the 'Haunted House' with an escort of police; and though Jumper denied all knowledge of you, he and his wife were taken prisoners."

"And the bear, too, I wonder?" said Dot. "Poor Jumpers; they are very wicked, but I am sorry they are put in prison for nothing, and escape being put in for something."

"The 'nothing' will weigh against the 'something,'" said Roy.

"Can't we send a telegram or something somehow?" asked Rex. "It is now sub-marine."

"What's 'marine'?" asked Dot.

"Under the sea," said Rex.

"Are there no stations, nor nothing to send a message? Shan't we pass some places or islands?"

"Robin, are you not sorry?" said Dot, upon being answered in the negative. "Don't you think you are going the wrong way to save lives? It may be your 'General's' way; but do you think that it's God's way?"

"The 'General's' way was always God's leading, though people did not always see it," answered Rex. "Go on, Roy, if you are able; but don't talk if you ought not. Now I know my father is alive, I can wait to hear the rest."

"No, Rob, you must hear the remainder. Listen! Your present act has caused three innocent people to be imprisoned, however bad they were or are. You were not in their possession when we stormed the 'Haunted House,' and disbelieved their assertion that you and Dot were not there. Mr. Young left his farm at the greatest inconvenience to look for you, and Mrs. Young was in great distress, for they loved Dot as their own child, and intended to adopt her, if no one else claimed her as their own, who was worthy to keep her. But—but— Oh, Rob, here is the worst part of what you have done. You little know who Dot is. I do," added Roy, tenderly placing his hand on her head, and stroking the soft golden hair. "Rob, who were the lady and gentleman with your father in the train?"

"I only saw the lady behind mother. It was Mrs. Desmond," said Rex, perplexed.

"Yes; Colonel and Mrs. Desmond. When the lock of white hair was mentioned, I shall never forget her look of joy, as she declared you must be her long-lost child; and, in that joy that spread over her face, we all saw the wonderful likeness to Dot. Mrs. Young instantly detected it. Ah! Rob; I wish you had seen her grief when she found she had seen her child at the station and lost her—perhaps lost her through you for ever."

Dot flung her arms round Rex, who, with a white face and bowed head, was listening silently, a convicted culprit.

"Don't be angry with him, Mr. Royston," said she, with a burst of tears; "he did offer to send me home—I mean to his father's. He wanted me to go over and over again, for we are married."

Roy started and brushed his hand across his head, as if doubting his own senses.

"Yes; we are properly married," continued Dot. "First at the registry office, and then in Church; and Robin thought he had better go this voyage alone, as he might have to rough it, though I told him I knew more what roughing it meant than he did. He said the 'General' sent his wife home to his mother, and that he should send me. So he is not to blame. You must not be angry with him. He has saved my life over and over again. Robin, darling, do not look so unhappy. I would rather be with you than any more mothers. I had never been happy in my life before I knew you. If that lady is really my mother, she will forgive you when I tell her how you saved my life, and married me before you knew I was a lady, so that you might protect me."

Roy was much moved at Dot's words—evidence of her unselfish love.

Rex had twined his arm round her—a sort of convulsive grip. Whatever the story of their marriage meant, it was pretty to see them so devoted to each other.

"Is that the end, Roy?" said he at last.

"Is not that enough?" said Roy. "There will be plenty to hear y-and-bye, for you were up at all the police-stations on Saturday."

"I want to hear about you, Roy. What was it—that—what made you ill?"

"The shock of your suddenly vanishing within a few yards of me. I had taken such care not to lose sight of you that last day or two, especially that morning, and to think that, at the very last moment, the station-master should have called me over. I was responsible for your safety to your father. Thank God, he saw you! He never blamed me; but I never went to bed for two nights. I the office on important business, yet I was wood; and the anxiety and fatigue, the thoug

sail with the fearful suspense on my mind, was too much for me, I suppose, for the boy I had lost I loved as a brother," faltered Roy.

"And do you love him no longer? Do you hate him now?" asked Rex, in a broken voice. "I did all this because I could not part with you, and now you love me no longer."

"Rob, old man, what has brought me back to life? It was the sound of your voice—the sight of your face. Yes, the voice that saved me once before."

Roy opened his arms, and the same instant they were clasped round Rex, who, in a burst of uncontrollable sobs, had thrown himself into them, and now lay nestled there; and so the doctor found them fast asleep when he paid a moonlight visit to the cabin, and Dot the same on the opposite berth.

Dr. Cook called them his "interesting trio," and marvelled extremely at Mr. Royston's rapid recovery. A few hours on deck worked wonders, and two days more put the finishing touches to restored strength.

Rex had renewed his acquaintance with Fag, and was one morning listening to his stories and looking at the "white horses" chasing each other across the ocean, when Roy called him.

"Rob; I have been obliged to tell the captain who you are. He asked several questions, being on the wrong scent like the passengers, thinking that you and Dot are the orphan children of Captain Drover; so I was obliged to undeceive him."

"Were you!" cried Rex, in dismay. "Could you not have kept our secret?"

"No, old man; could not possibly. It would not have been honourable."

"Was he angry?"

"Why, imagine how he has been taken in. Fancy, if every boy who wanted to go a voyage on his own account were to do as you have done. Of course, he will speak to you about it; but be a brave boy, and tell him you are sorry."

Roy hastened away, and Rex leant over the bulwarks by himself, wondering what was in store for him. A short time after an official came towards him. From the quantity of gold lace about his uniform he thought at first he was the captain ; but a nearer view told him that it was the first steward, who told him that the captain wished to see him in his cabin, and to bring his sister with him. So Rex ran for Dot, who, with him, had become a great favourite on board, and drew her from the midst of a party of ladies and children, and rapidly told her on their way the reason of their summons, and begged her to be quite a lady—to remember that she was the daughter of a colonel, and his wife, which he was very glad of, as he could protect her.

There was an officer waiting for them, who conducted them into a charming deck-cabin on the starboard side of the vessel, some little way abaft the engine-room. It was most beautifully fitted up, more like a private sitting-room at Radcliffe Hall, except for a rack of telescopes and many other seaman-like contrivances.

Rex gave a little start. He expected to find the captain alone, reading or writing, instead of which he was seated in a chair of state, with Roy on his right hand, the doctor, several of the ship's officers, gentlemen, and a few ladies quite at the back.

Rex took off his cap and bowed, and the captain made a motion with his finger. He thought he wanted to shake hands, so was advancing, when he was ordered back.

"Stand there, sir, if you please," said Captain Paton. "You profess to be under the orders of a great 'General,' so consider yourself under arrest. First, I am going to catechize you both. What is your name?"

"Robert Rover."

"That is wrong to begin with ; and yours, little girl,

"Dot."

"Dot what ? Who ?"

"Only 'Dot.'"

"Nonsense. Who gave you that name?"

"My godfathers and godmothers in my baptism," replied Dot, quickly, remembering the day at the registry office.

There was a great titter in the background, and the captain looked round and frowned.

"What is your surname?"

"Robert Rover."

"How can your name be Robert? That is your brother's."

"He is not my brother; he is my husband."

The ladies all found it necessary to draw out their handkerchiefs.

"What does she mean?" asked the captain.

"What she says. She means that she is my wife, Mrs. Robert Rover. We were married at the registry office, and afterwards at church."

"I was not aware that there is a children's registry office," remarked the captain.

"It was not a children's," negatived Dot. "Two gentlemen married us, and we signed our names in a great book."

"Did they know you?"

"No," answered Rex. "They were strangers—the owners of the office."

"Where was the office?" demanded the captain.

"Motley," said Rex.

"Motley, where?"

"Near Briarwood, Kent," said Rex, which information was transferred to the captain's note-book.

"Did you say that little game was finished in church?"

"It was not a game. Marriage is a serious thing," said Rex. "My 'General,' that you said just now you knew, says that it ought never to be undertaken lightly, and——"

"So we thought it serious, too," chimed in Dot.

"What clergyman married you?" continued Captain Paton, and everybody listened anxiously for the answer.

"Not any clergyman. It was more solemn than that," said Dot, with a look of awe stealing over her little face. "For God joined our hands, and what He joins together 'let no man put asunder.' It is in the Bible, sir. I hope you don't think we would be so wicked as to go into church to play at anything so solemn as being married?"

At the beginning of Dot's speech there was intense amusement on every countenance, but towards her last words every face was grave at the intense reality and solemnity she evidently realized for a ceremony, which many were afraid that they had treated very lightly, as a mere necessary form.

"I should like to hear what your ideas are upon providing for a wife when you have married her," said the captain, drily, looking round the table; "but that is irrelevant to the subject. Neither in a court martial, or trial of any kind, should there be questions asked for the mere amusement of the audience," added he, with a meaning glance resting on a barrister sitting next to Roy.

"Now, sir, to the point at issue. How came you on board under a feigned name?"

"That is my own proper name," said Rex, proudly. "I said, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Rover,' and they let us pass."

The captain exchanged a few words with an officer, who left the cabin, and Rex was asked several more questions, which he answered concisely, with an echo from Dot, by which time the officer returned and spoke in a low voice to the captain.

"You have taken advantage of a great mistake, and have been treated most kindly, when you were really nothing but stowaways, hiding on my vessel."

"We did not hide. We were shown to that cabin," replied Rex.

"Indeed we did not hide," repeated Dot. "Please believe him; he never tells stories."

"So it seems," said the captain. "This has been one great story from beginning to end."

"I have never told a lie in all my life," cried Rex, with a great jerk of his shoulders, his head thrown back and flashing indignant glances at his judge ; while Dot's eyes were bent on him, burning like red-hot coals.

"You have acted them, my boy, though you may not have deliberately uttered them."

"I have only tried to act as my 'General,' and my father said 'Go and do likewise,' and I did. He saved lives, and that was what I wanted to do, and have done, and mean to do, till I win the 'Victoria Cross.'"

There was a sparkle in the captain's eye ; his face was partly concealed by his hand as he asked,

"Have you ever saved lives—one life?"

"Yes," answered Rex, but said no more.

"Yes," repeated Dot. "He has saved mine—saved me more than once from being killed by a bear, and——"

A sharp tug at her dress told her she was to say no more.

"Am I not to hear any more?" said the captain. "No great act in your defence?"

Rex would not for the world have his exploits repeated by a soul, let alone by himself. He had caught a tender, beaming glance out of Roy's eye ; that was all he wanted. It gave him courage.

"Captain Paton," said he, "my 'General' said 'a man ought not to be condemned on circumstantial evidence, not even a soldier,' but you are condemning me. I am acting under 'sealed orders.' I have not meant to do wrong. When the orders are unsealed, it will be seen that I have not. I will pay towards my passage and Dot's, and my father will give you the rest. I know he will ; or I will work my passage out, and then if that is not enough, you shall have the remainder when we go back."

"How much money have you towards your passage?" asked the captain.

"£2 8s. 6½d.," was the reply, amidst a visible titter.

"Go and fetch your purse."

The two children were turning away, when the captain added,

"Bring your other belongings—not your clothes—your property."

"I am afraid they have not much to bring, poor children," said Roy.

"I want to put him to the test about what you mentioned," said the captain.

"They are the sweetest little couple ever seen," said a lady.

"I would have given worlds to have seen them married," said another.

"My first act, after I arrive in England, will be to solve the mystery of the ceremony at the registry office," said Roy.

"Please ask Dot her surname," said a lady. "She is so like a friend of mine."

Roy was about to reply, when the objects of so much interest returned. Dot only carried a purse, but Rex had his greatcoat on his arm, and his Testament and the "General" in his hand.

"First let me see the passage-money."

Dot drew out of the purse two half-crowns and three shillings, a sixpence, and a halfpenny, which she demurely handed to the captain.

"That is some of mine and some of his," said she. "The gold is in his bank."

"Safe at home, eh?"

"No," said Rex, cutting open the lining of his coat. "Here are £3. I put them here for safety, as the 'General' did."

"How did you get them?"

"From my own money-box. There was ever so much more in there, but it would not come out. I am sorry now, as there would have been so much more to give you."

"And was this out of your money-box, little woman?" asked the captain.

Rex had drilled her not to mention the bear again on any account, so after a moment's hesitation, she replied,

"It was never in a box. It was once mine—most of it; but after we were married, and he had said, 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow,' he made me take it back again."

"Quite right," said the captain, who seemed suddenly to have a cold in his head, and continually to require his pocket-handkerchief.

"Are you quite sure there is not more of this cargo? Perhaps that coat is lined with gold, or bank-notes."

"I have handed over every farthing I possess," said Rex, with a great fall of the shoulders, and a flash, as he handed it to the captain.

"No, my boy, I do not doubt your word, so you need not place your hand where your sword will be one day. Your 'General' would have demanded it when you were first arrested, instead of which you must yield *him* up." And the captain took both books away, while Rex gave a lingering look and turned very pale.

"Am I never to see them again, sir?"

"That depends how you act while under arrest. You are to occupy a separate cabin, and not to leave it without orders. Go with that officer. Not you, my dear little girl. Here is a lady who would like to take care of you."

"I do not wish to be taken care of, thank you," said Dot. "I must go with my husband to prison. You cannot separate us for 'man is not to put us asunder.' Please, sir, let me go to prison instead of him. I can bear it better; and if not, let me go with him. Feed us on bread and water down in a dungeon, only let us be together. We will not speak if you order us not," and Dot threw herself on her knees at the captain's side, with the tears streaming down her face,

and handkerchiefs for the company were required to hide something more than smiles.

"My child, we do not have dungeons here on board, unless you think the hold is one, and he is not going to be thrown down there."

"What is your name besides Dot?"

"I am Mrs. Robert Rover; but I suppose if we are married again when we are grown up, if it were not quite legal the other day, as Rob thinks, then I shall be Mrs. Reginald Radcliffe."

"I mean your own name. Who is your father?"

"Colonel Desmond, I believe," hesitated Dot, looking at Roy for contradiction or assent.

"Oh, Dot, darling, come to me," said a lady coming towards her. "I know your mother so well. We were schoolfellows. You are so exactly like her. Have you a little lock of white hair?"

"Yes," said Dot, "plaited up under my hair."

"Then you are Dorothy Desmond. I wish I could let your dear mother know."

"She does know, at least she is pretty sure that is the case," said Roy. "She has just seen her at the station, and then she vanished. I mean Dot."

Rex looked so unhappy, that he would not say more.

"Poor Nora; but I am so glad," said the lady, devouring Dot with kisses.

"Come here," said the captain to Rex. "You may have one of these books to take to prison. Choose—the Testament or the 'General?'"

The boy fixed his eyes on both.

"The 'General' would say 'the Testament,' so I will take that. Thank you, sir."

"I think, lad, that if you had taken this as your guide, you would not be here now for 'court martial.' Go."

Dot threw her arms round him, sobbing; and Rex, feeling

very much inclined to follow suit, gave her one great hug, and bowing to the captain, turned to follow the officer.

"Dot, you may go and see his prison," said the captain, kindly, "then come back to this lady."

"I hope Sir Roland Radcliffe will not think I have been too severe with his son," said Captain Paton to Roy, as the cabin door closed upon the children.

"I think he will be very grateful for the lesson you have given him," said Roy.

"You see, it would have been sure to get wind amongst the troop of boys on board, who would all be ready enough to follow his example, and visit foreign lands at the expense of infinite torture to their parents."

"There is an immense deal of good about him," said Roy—"more than is seen on the surface. A brave chap too."

"That I can see," replied Captain Paton. And he was to know a little of it too, sooner than the good man expected.

Rex was confined to a small nook off the cabin of the third officer, and though he was not aware of it, in close vicinity to Roy's, entered by another passage unknown to him. He was allowed to be on deck for a short time in the morning and again in the afternoon.

The captain was on the look out for the steamer *Hermione*, on her way from Jamaica. He was in hopes she might not pass in the night, as he wished to signal her and send a message to England, as to the presence on board and safety of our hero and heroine. Alas! that message was only the *avant couriers* of another.

It was a lovely day. Passengers were recovering. Nearly all were on deck, engaged in various games, and lounging under the awnings reading. It was Rex's hour for being on deck, so he and Dot were of course together. Had it been possible, she would have sat on the floor outside his prison like a puppy. As that was not feasible, she waited anxiously for the sound of the bells that was to be the signal of his hours of freedom.

To-day they were on each side of Fag, listening to his adventures in the Fiji Islands, when suddenly the vessel rolled in the most extraordinary manner, giving such a violent lurch, that Dot might have been pitched over, and Rex, but Fagg pulled them back. The captain flew to the bridge; the passengers first to one side and then the other; and several of the engineers ran up, thinking they were running upon some rocks. The officers did all they could to prevent a panic, when the waves disclosed what appeared like boats, keels upward. Then the sea was all streaked with blood. What could it be? Had they run down a craft? Presently the captain shouted, "A whale! A great whale! We have gone clean through a huge whale! I have never heard of such a thing before," said he, as the people calmed down, "or of one so large being in this latitude. If it had been the *Hermione*, I believe the creature would have capsized her."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Fag, who was passing. "You are right there. That whale would have had her over as clean as a cow rolls down a woman. That old girl, *Hermione*, is as light as a shuttlecock before the wind." Then the sailor added in a low voice to Roy, who was a few steps in advance, "look where your youngster is, sir."

Roy glanced in the direction of the spot indicated, and saw Rex half up a mast, enjoying his bird's-eye view of the departed whale, a friendly sail hiding him from the eyes of the captain. Dot had managed to climb to some high projecting wood-work, intensely happy in their freedom.

"He's a plucky little chap, sir. Nothing turns him giddy."

"Your time will soon be up, so you had better come down," called Roy, passing on to his cabin to write out a statement. Suddenly he was summoned to the deck amidst shouts and cries of, "On the main-truck!"

Rex, seized with a desire to climb the mainmast, had got to that highest part—the royal pole—and was actually standing at that very moment on the main-truck—a small circular piece of

wood on the very summit of the loftiest mast, and at a height so great from the deck, that it was enough to make one's brain dizzy to look at him. There was nothing above or around him but the empty air. The intelligence of poor Rex's temerity spread through the vessel like wildfire, and in a moment the deck was crowded with people—passengers, officers, crew, and all gazing upwards, none daring to speak, expecting every moment a fatal termination to the awful suspense. At this moment there was a stir amongst the crowd, and directly after another face was added to those on the main-deck. It was Roy, who looked up at the little figure—its white face, with one of indescribable agony. Every eye remained fixed on the same spot; but no one offered a suggestion. The next moment he felt a grasp, and he saw Dot kneeling at his feet, a wild look in her eyes, burning like red-hot coals.

"Save him! Save him! They say he will be killed!" cried she, clasping his knees with a spasmodic clutch.

Roy wondered whether Rex recognized the little suppliant, for he heard around that he quivered.

The first officer held a trumpet in his hand. Roy seized it and raised it to his lips, and then let it drop, as if from a sad consciousness of the utter uselessness of what he intended to say. Then he turned and looked at Dot.

"Cannot feather beds be brought for him to fall on, as they do on the stage? It is not so much higher than the trapeze," cried Dot.

Tears stood in the eyes of the bystanders, who only shook their heads. Roy vanished to the captain's cabin, and met him coming up, attracted by the rush of feet and then the sudden stillness. Before Roy had finished the few words that flashed out of his mouth, the captain had grasped the situation, darted back into his cabin and seized his pistol. The next moment there was a hushed murmur on deck, as way was made for the captain and Roy. Stepping back a few

paces, he levelled it at Rex, calling out to him at the same time in a voice of thunder,

"Jump overboard! Jump, or I'll shoot you!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when our hero, with hardly a moment's hesitation, sprang out into the air. Dot screamed, and Roy covered his face with his hands. With a peculiar rushing sound, the boy dropped into the water; but before the waves closed over him, Roy had leaped into the sea, followed by Fag and six of his mates, who dived from the bulwarks.

After a few seconds, which seemed like hours to poor Dot, Rex rose to the surface, and struck out bravely for the ship. Dot was lifted up in the arms of a tall officer, clapping her hands, while cheer upon cheer rang from the lips of every one on board.

Roy saw that Rex looked very white, so he and Fag brought him round the stern to the steps, by giving a support with one hand.

Dot was foremost in the group at the gangway, and dripping though he was, she put her arms round him, crying and laughing. There was someone else near Dot, who had lost all his colour from the first moment he came on deck; it was Captain Paton. Patting his wet head, as he paused before him, he said,

"You have done a brave thing, my boy. Few could climb such a height as that; still fewer spring from it into the sea. It was your only chance of life; had you tried to turn, you would have been dashed to pieces. It was a foolhardy thing for you to do. I was obliged to act as I did. All my fear was that you would not leap far enough out, and would fall against the bulwarks. I suppose, after such a feat, I must give you back your sword," added he, with a kindly smile. "Mr. Royston shall bring it you. You are free."

So Roy took him back to his own cabin, undressed and made him warm and comfortable, and the steward brought in hot coffee.

The doctor ordered him to remain in his berth till next morning, and advised Mr. Royston to do the same. So Dot came in and had her tea with Rex, and was allowed to come back to her own little inner cabin ; but not before the two had given their heartfelt thanks for Rex's wonderful preservation.

"Rob, old man, your life has been saved by a miracle," said Roy. "The captain says so. It requires a firm head, a steady eye to mount so aloft ; constant practice, the agility of a monkey, and the lightness of a lark."

"That's me all over," said Rex. "That's why I knew I could try it. I've had no end of practice going up to the top of elm trees ; flying down our well-staircase like a monkey. Father said I was a lark, Roy."

The next few days were very happy ones to Dot and Rex. The following morning, when they were sitting aft, enjoying the balmy western breeze, through which the ship was rushing with outspread sails, which Dot compared to an ostrich flying, Roy passed them with a gentleman, and put a parcel into Rex's hands.

"From the captain, Rob. Your sword and some of the lining of your coat."

What could he mean ? He soon found out. With delight he beheld his beloved "General," and then all the money he had given up for their passage.

"Dot ; this is very kind and generous of Captain Paton. I think I shall give some of it to those sailors who plunged in after me."

Dot thought it a splendid idea, so it was confided to Roy, who quite agreed. So Rex first gave his friend, Fag, the "lion's share," and then a small one to each of his would-be preservers, quite winning their hearts by his warm graceful way of doing it—shaking their hands, and saying something nice to each, such as, "Thank you for trying to save my life. I hope you will save many lives. It is a grand thing to save lives." Little thinking how his thirst for so doing was to be again satisfied.

There was one passenger on board, and only one, who hated the very sight of Rex, and that was the captain's son, Dick, the worry of everyone on board, teasing the children, or any animals he could get at. The interest our hero excited, when supposed to be the orphan son of Captain Drover, filled him with jealousy; and his happiest moment on board was when he heard that he was to be punished for permitting the mistake to be continued. He was dreadfully disappointed at not being present at the "court-martial," and glory over his fall and discomfiture, and used every taunt he could think of during the time that the prisoner was on deck. The climax, to his envy, came when Rex performed the feat of mounting the mainmast, which he knew he could not have accomplished even half way, though three years older. He felt stung to the quick when his father held him up as a model for his manners in general. So when he rushed on deck with his pistol, and levelled it at the object of detestation, his was indeed delighted surprise; but it was of short duration. Instead of being shot or smashed, he won, by his bravery and agility, the admiration of all the passengers and crew, his father included. So his rage knew no bounds, and he vented it on Rex by every possible means; which he had just found out was a surer means of annoying Rex. To-day he had run off with a doll that had been given to Dot and thrown it high into the rigging, where she was climbing after it. At that moment Captain Paton passed, amazed at the graceful way in which she swung from rope to rope; but he quickly ordered her down, and enquired the reason of her ascent.

"Only to fetch my doll."

"It did not climb up there by itself, did it?"

"Oh, no, it was thrown up."

"That was cruel," said the captain.

"Pray, was that your throw?" added he to Rex, who came up at the moment with a very flushed face, and sprang before the captain, who was kindly helping her down.

Dot made an exclamation :

"Oh, my beautiful pet is damaged for life—smashed face blind in one eye, and a broken leg."

"Is this your work?" enquired Captain Paton again.

"No—oh, no!" cried Dot, "he would never kill anything I loved."

"Who was it then?"

"Please, sir, do not ask. We would rather not say," replied the two together.

"But I insist upon knowing," said the captain.

"It was Dick. I have just chased him round the ship to give him a fright," said Rex. "He was afraid I was going to your cabin, sir, so please do not be angry with him."

"I am very sorry, my little girl. I guessed it was Dick. I am afraid we shall not pass a toy shop on our way to the West Indies, or I would buy you another."

"It does not matter one bit, sir. I am quite happy without it. You see, I have Robin, and he is better than a thousand dolls."

It was evening. The sun had set in its crimson glory, leaving wonderful golden and green streaks behind. The children sat and talked with Roy about it, and when he left, they said over to each other all the verses they had been learning about the sea, which had been a compact between them during his imprisonment.

The twilight was becoming shorter, and soon the sky was spangled with stars, some of the names of which he knew and was delighted to trace out to Dot, who was discovering wonders in the phosphorescent sea.

"I am so glad you have taught me so much about the Bible, Robin," said she, after a long pause. "I have quite loved it since we have been to sea. If I lost the places you gave me, Mr. Royston found them, and marked some more. Which do you most like to think about? I was picturing just now Jesus walking on the sea. Oh, Rob; it must have been so

beautiful. I wish I had been there. I don't think I should have been frightened like Peter. I wish he would come now and walk on the sea, and——"

"And you would do just as Peter did—look down at the waves, instead of looking up to Christ, and at His hand stretched out to save," said Rex.

"Perhaps I should; and yet I think if I had heard His gentle voice say, 'Come,' and looked into His lovely face and seen Him smile, as I am sure He must have done when He said, 'Suffer the little children to come unto Me,' I should not look down at the sea at all."

"I think about 'There shall be no more sea.' That will be awfully nice to run up and down what will be hills and mountains then. Halloo; what's the matter?"

Dot had cried out at a violent tug being given to her hair.

"Are you two hatching up another fraud to get a fellow into a row? You great sneak! You double-distilled storyteller! I'm glad your doll is smashed, you goggle-eyed, red-haired muffin!"

And Dick, snatching the "General" from Rex's side, and giving another fierce tug to Dot's golden mane, bounced off, followed by the two children—Dot to rescue the "General," and Rex to protect Dot.

They would have gained upon him at once had they known their way about, being far more agile. All Rex feared that he would throw his beloved "General" into the sea. Guessing he might be coming round by the doctor's cabin, he hid in the nook behind, and pouncing out upon him, so took him by surprise, that he dropped the book, and flew on crying out,

"I will be revenged. You shall never see Dot again."

Rex thought she was just behind him, and was terribly frightened upon failing to see her, and rushed off in pursuit.

A strong wind had risen, and the *Victoria* was rushing along under a full head of steam, and with every inch of her canvas set to ease the screw.

There was a concert going on under an awning on the upper-deck, so a greater part of the passengers had gathered there. When the wind rose higher and higher, Captain Paton suggested that they should retire to the drawing-room; but there was a petition to be allowed to finish a concerted piece. Towards its conclusion he said,

"There seems an extraordinary lull, so you can remain here if you like," and he went out into the open.

The next instant there was a cry and a rush of feet; then that terrible cry, "Man overboard! man overboard!"

The violins and every other instrument were thrown down, and the upper and lower decks crowded to the sides.

The captain was on the bridge, having given orders for the engines to stop. "Who is it?" "Who is the man?" "Is it one of the crew?" "Is it a passenger?" were the cries.

A child's scream rose above the questioning groups.

"It is Rob! It's Robin!" Dot flew to the captain's side.

Fag and many others had lowered a boat. Several were in the water.

While she was shrieking out her terrible news that Dick had caught her and thrown her on the deck, Rex flew to her rescue, and in the scuffle, Dick rolled him on his back, and turned to run away, when the vessel gave a lurch and Dick fell overboard, giving a piercing cry, which caused Rex to spring to his feet.

"Where are you, Dick?" he called, looking over the extreme end of the vessel.

"Here; save me!" screamed Dick, the voice already distant.

Rex tore off his coat and leaped overboard, before the sailors realized that it was not play, but a terrible reality. It all took place quicker than it has taken to describe.

"The electric buoy!" called the captain.

The next moment an illuminated buoy splashed down into



"I HAVE HIM ALL RIGHT, CAPTAIN."

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the deep, and then a brilliant electric light radiated over the waters.

"I see him! I see him!" called Rex, at the top of his voice.

Captain Paton, his heart sinking with fear, and Roy beside him, committing his darling to the One Mighty Arm, that could alone bear him up, stood with eager eyes and silent lips, watching him grasp a floating form.

"I have him. All right, captain."

The sailors were round him, and bore Dick's unconscious form into the boat, and then his little preserver, who leaped in, crying out, "Hurrah! he is saved!" which was taken up by the sailors, with three rounds of cheers for the 'little admiral,' whom they really had far greater pleasure in saving than the 'torment of the voyage.'

"Can't quite make out whether he's dead or alive," said one to the other.

"He's alive as a eel is out of water. He's saved for a drier death ashore," laughed another.

There was not much life in Dick, however, for being a great coward, his fright kept him from swimming properly; and he would certainly have been drowned, had he not felt Rex's clutch, as he was just losing his senses.

The doctor was at hand, and soon restored him to consciousness, to the great relief and gratitude of Captain Paton.

Rob took Rex off to his own cabin to comfort and pet all to himself. After the great excitement he had undergone he lay very quiet. As for Dot, she could not stop crying; her nerves were quite unstrung. Mrs. Emlin bore her off to the vacant berth in her cabin, and soothed her off to sleep; but when she saw Rex again next morning, she was very nearly going off into another fit of crying.

"Did you think you were drowning, Robin?" asked she, when she had heard his account.

"No; I never felt I should drown once. I thought Dick

would until he floated, and then I got him. I felt as if I were being held up—such a strange feeling. Dottie, dear, you wanted to see Jesus walking on the sea. Well, He was there. I am sure it was His hand that kept me up."

Captain Paton brought him Dick, and made him say how sorry he was for all that had happened the night before, and to thank Rex for risking his own life to save his. Then his father sent him away, and he folded Rex in his arms.

"You have set my son a lesson I hope he will learn—that of returning good for evil. Thank you; bless you, my boy, for saving his life."

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHIPWRECK.

SIR ROLAND and Lady Radcliffe were having a silent breakfast. Neither liked to express their fears to each other. The posters outside the police-offices, with a full description of Rex and Dot, had failed to bring any certain clue to their whereabouts. Plenty of people, and a number of letters arrived with the intelligence that they had seen children answering to that description, which, when closely questioned, failed to satisfy. The only one to whom any certainty could be attached, was the elder of the two young clerks at the registry office at Motley, who, much against his inclination, was sent by his principal to give a full account of what passed that memorable day. Expecting only to be severely reprimanded for the hoax practised on the children, he was greatly surprised at his kind reception.

Colonel and Mrs. Desmond had returned home ; but it was found so inconvenient, as all enquiries were instituted from Radcliffe Hall, that they were hastily summoned back, and were present at the amusing account rendered by the young clerk, who, when he found how deeply interested the two mothers were in the event, and did not blame him for the part he had taken in it, entered far more into detail. They talked over it afterwards with tears and laughter.

This particular morning breakfast was late. The post-bag was not very satisfactory, and depression fell on the little

party, until the arrival of the *Times*, which changed the current of thought for a while.

Sir Roland had just finished reading aloud a special leader, when his eye fell on something in the next sheet.

"News, I do believe!" he exclaimed, nearly tearing the sheet in half with rapidity, while every knife and fork was suspended, and eager eyes were bent upon him. "Yes; news of the children! Thank God! But where do you think they are? Listen!

"The Royal Mail Company's S.S. *Hermione*, from the West Indies, *via* Plymouth, arrived at Southampton yesterday morning, bringing intelligence that she had spoken with the R.M.S. *Victoria*, outward bound for Jamaica, the principal signal being, 'The children of Sir Roland Radcliffe on board, quite well.'"

"At sea! How came they there?" cried Lady Radcliffe, springing to the side of her husband to read the news herself.

"Children!" repeated Mrs. Desmond. "That means my little Dorothy. Who has stolen them?"

"They have stolen themselves," laughed Sir Roland, "don't you see?"

"Oh, how can you laugh?" said his wife, with tears in her eyes. "Rex and Dot tossing about the Atlantic."

"You may depend upon it, they are safe enough. Why, don't you remember the *Victoria* is Mr. Royston's vessel? It is all clear to me now. They fell in love with the model, which we saw, and Rex was determined to go with his new friend; but they cannot have gone with him, for he would never have taken them on board."

"They hid," laughed the Colonel. "Became little stow-aways. How they would have caught it if Royston had not been on board to explain matters."

"Serve them right if they did catch it," said Sir Roland.

"Fancy my Dorothy being a stowaway," groaned Mrs. Desmond.

"Certainly she is a 'Will-o'-the-wisp,' a shadow without a substance," replied her husband. Never mind, Nora, cheer up, you know she exists, and I dare say is a perfect pet on board, which is much more than the young monkey deserves."

"Of course it was Rex's fault."

"I have not the least doubt of it," said Sir Roland; "but you see she was bound to follow her lord and master. You forget the relationship, my love."

"I believe our little Eve led the way," suggested the Colonel. "She has been so accustomed to be a wandering 'star,' that she will never rest with us. She will cut the traces and be up in a balloon as queen of the Milky Way."

The next day, to their great surprise and delight, came a short letter from Roy, written after the *Hermione* was sighted, giving, however, a full account of the discovery of the lost children on board the *Victoria*—all that they knew, and a little more. Lady Roland's heart beat when she saw an enclosed letter, with all kinds of quirks and flourishes, that she knew so well; and when that was opened, like the Japanese puzzle boxes, there was yet another, addressed to Mrs. Desmond, and the first thing she did was to cry over it.

Rex's letter was characteristic, asking forgiveness for any anxiety and trouble; but that he must, as far as he could, carry out the life of his "General" in his own, his father having said, "Go and do likewise," which he was endeavouring to do with all his might. That he had married Dot at the registry office, and then at the church; and that he had wished, like the "General," to send his young wife home to his mother, to be taken care of while he was absent, saving lives he hoped, and roughing it at sea. But the said wife so evidently objected, that he had taken her with him. That he could not separate from Roy, who was to him as the most beloved elder brother. That the captain was very angry when

he found out that they were not the children of Captain Drover, and that a "court martial" had been held over him, and he was sentenced to be imprisoned; but he only minded the separation from Dot, who he knew would fret, for his jailor was very kind, and he was not put into irons or fed on bread and water; in fact, the officer generally hauled out of his pocket something nice. He was having splendid adventures. Up to the main-truck, where he was shot at by the captain, and jumped into the sea—not dead. Roy plunged in at great risk to his life, for he had been dangerously ill, and kept him afloat. Then, after a day or two, he himself jumped into the sea to save the captain's son, who had fallen overboard. How thankful he was that his father had made him learn to swim. He could not find him at first, when suddenly there was a splash in the water, and it was the next moment brilliantly illuminated by an electric buoy, like one of Katie's fairy tales.

"Just as I caught him floating—I mean Dick—up swam the sailors and a boat, so we were hauled in with such jolly cheers and hurrahs, strong enough to draw anyone out of the water. Katie will laugh when I tell her that the beginning of it all was my trying to save Dot's doll from his clutches. Fancy being drowned for the sake of a doll—all bran and wax. To think what a man will do for the sake of his wife."

Dot's little note began :

MY DEAR MOTHER—

"That is, if you are *really* my very own mother, and do not mean to sell me, like all my other mothers have done—I hope you will forgive me for running away just as you found me; but I did not know who you were until out at sea, and, besides, anyhow I should have gone with Robin, for we are married. It was all so beautiful, that I hope it was not 'legal,' as Rob calls it, so that we can have it all over again, for I had such lovely flowers, and he made such a wonderful

prayer, that has been answered over and over again. It was so very solemn—God joining our hands—that I was obliged to come with him, for it would have been wicked to let man put us asunder."

Then she went on to speak of Rex's love and care, and his great feats of bravery. Roy had said not a little of the same thing, so they read a great deal between the lines of Rex's own letter—a letter that had been written on the sea, and yet was dry. Now, though on land, both were wet with briny tears. How Nora Desmond kissed the first letter from her long-lost eldest child. There were many laughs over them both. The two fathers did nothing but laugh. Mr. Royston's presence on the vessel made all the difference to them.

Ah! if they had only known that the grand ship, *Victoria*, had lost her way in a dense fog. For days the captain and the officers of the watch thought they were steaming north of Port Rico, instead of which they were nearing the islands east of the Caribbean Sea.

For two days they were only advancing very slowly, creeping, compared to what they had done. On this eventful day Captain Paton had just said that they ought to sight land next morning, if the fog lifted. At present the ship was under the lowest possible steam. Darkness was coming on and the fog denser, so it was difficult to ascertain her exact whereabouts.

Suddenly came a wild shout forward.

"Ship ahead! Ship ahead!"

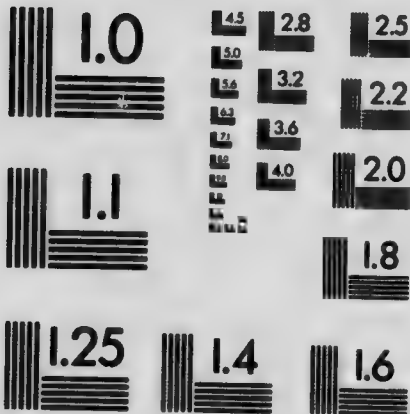
Then came an awful yell from many voices: "Starboard! Hard-a-starboard!"

Like the leap of a stag when shot, the captain rushed on to the bridge. At the same moment the engine-bell rang, and the steering-chains began a furious rattle as the steam steering-gear did its work. Then came another yell: "It's a steamer! No lights!" and an answering shriek of terror from some great black object that loomed ahead.



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Before the echoes had died away, before the *Victoria* could even answer to her helm, there was a crash, such as Mr. Royston had never heard, and a dread shock that threw him on the deck, just where he had been talking to Captain Paton—a crash so terrific, that the iron masts trembled as though they were ash trees, making the huge sails flap and fly aback.

The vessel had been plunged into by the smaller steamer, rushing along at her usual speed, and the *Victoria* had cut her clean in two, and passed over her, as though she were a pleasure-boat.

Shriek upon shriek of wild despair came piercing the gathering darkness. As Frank Royston struggled to his feet, to hasten after the two children was his first thought. Rex was not far off.

"What is it, Roy?" he exclaimed. "What are these horrible bumps?"

Yes, they were indeed horrible, for it was the *Victoria* driving right over the remains of the unfortunate steamer with a crushing, grinding noise. It seemed all the work of a few moments. Looking astern, Roy could just make out something black, that seemed to float for a second or two upon the water, and then disappear into its depths. It was the shattered hull of the little steamer.

Rex was at his side the moment before, but the next he had flown after Dot, just as Roy was telling him to stay where he was, while he went in search of her. Then there arose a faint murmuring sound, that grew from a hum into a roar, and then into a clamour, enough to scatter the fog unto the four winds of heaven, and up from every hatchway and cabin in that "floating city" human beings—men, women, and children—came rushing and scrambling, with faces white with terror, in all kinds of attire, many having retired early to rest. Children in their night-dresses, with blankets thrown over them, tumbling over each other. Up came the multitudes, pouring aft, creating a hideous uproar.

Roy clung to the nettings to let the rush go by, and to prevent himself from catching the dreadful contagion of the panic, realizing that all on board were in great peril. It was clear that so frightful a collision could not have taken place without injury to their own vessel. Where were "his children," as people called them? Were they being trampled under foot by the surging masses? He ran to the saloon hatchway. It was cleared now, for most people were on deck, and he found his way to his own cabin with little difficulty. There, to his surprise, knelt Rex and Dot, clasped in each other's arms. He caught her up and told Rex to follow. At the head of the "companion" they encountered the captain, pushing his way through the maddened mob, all screeching at once.

"That's right, Royston. I thought of those poor children, but dare not look after them. Told Fag just now to do so."

"Captain, tell me the worst, for I guess it. We are in danger of foundering?"

"Yes, Mr. Royston. Nothing short of an ironclad ram could have stood such a shock. We were run into by a small cruising steamer, that plies between the smaller islands of the Caribbean Sea. We went through and over her. She was showing no lights. Our fore compartment is stove right in, bulging out the plates on each side of the cut-water, and loosening the fore bulkhead. The carpenter and his mates are doing their best to shore it up from the inside with balks of timber; but the water is entering in cataracts, and I fear there are other injuries. All the pumps are at work, but there's a deal of water, and if the bulkhead goes——"

"We shall go too," said Roy, with calmness. "What about the boats? It was a question with the firm. I said there ought to be more."

"You were right," said the captain, raising his white face towards the light fixed in the "companion." "There are not enough boats. The owners ought to have had more, or less

passengers. I have ordered all the boats to be ready. I rely upon you to explain matters to the owners, Royston, if you escape, and clear my character." Then in a choked voice he added, "Try and get my boy a place in the boat, and give this letter to my wife, should you live to reach England," and thrusting it into his hand with a convulsive shake, which Roy never forgot, he flew back to his post.

A strange, stunned feeling crept over Roy. In a few moments he might be dead ; and yet he was astonished at his own calmness. How different to that terrible day in the plantation not so many weeks back, when his heart stood still at the horror of the thought, and at what his own hand was to have accomplished, had not another Hand prevented through the little voice at his side, and which since had more than once been the echo of the still, small voice within. Cost what it might—yea, his own life—the brave young hearts should not perish as long as he breathed !

"Is it because you know that Jesus is on the sea, that you are not frightened? Did you hear 'It is I, be not afraid?'"

Roy looked down. It was Dot. He was not quite sure who she was addressing, but he answered,

"Yes ; He is there with loving arms to save you both."

"Dot must be saved first," said Rex.

"You have already been saved, Rob," said Dot, "so God does not mean you to drown now."

"I understood the captain," said Rex, with firm lips, "I must take my chance with the men. You shall go into the boats with the women and children."

"No, I won't," said Dot. "We are husband and wife, and we're not to be 'sundered.' We will live together, or die together, and then it won't be 'until death do us part'"

For one moment Roy clasped the two to his heart, and knelt with them to commit them into the Hand that rules the waves ; the next they were hurrying aft and encountered Fag, pushing his way through the fear-distracted crowd.

"Glad you have those youngsters, sir. Have you got your revolver?"

"No."

"You ought to have it. They will try and rush the boats."

It was an awful scene of terror. Round about were gathered the officers and some of the crew, doing their best to prepare the boats for lowering. One had already been got away—a party of ladies and children; but some were shrieking for a husband or child left behind, and the children were screaming for a mother or father still on board.

"This way—quick. One more." An officer took hold of Dot, intending to throw her into the boat, but she struggled from his grasp, and her mother's schoolfellow was pitched in instead against her will.

"Come with me," shouted Fag in the ear of young Royston, catching up Dot, saying they were all going together.

Roy and Rex followed aft, where two sailors, standing by the davits that supported a small boat, were lowering her to the level of the bulwarks.

"Fag, are you going in this?" asked Roy.

"Yes, sir, and you too!"

"Not as long as there is a woman on board," replied Roy.

"Take care of those precious lives, Fag."

"Aye, aye, sir. Come 'little admiral,'" cried the sailor, making a clutch at Rex.

"I am not a woman," said Rex, starting back.

"And I am not a woman," repeated Dot, following suit.

"Go, children—go!" cried Roy, with a convulsive embrace.

"We shall meet again."

And before our hero and heroine were aware, they were mown and caught, and deposited at the bottom of the boat, where they ran imminent risk of being jumped upon, or having a keg of biscuits and other things thrown on their heads. Some men had made a rush at the last, but were

driven back, and in a few moments the sailors in the boat gave way—another, and it was out of earshot.

At that instant there was a loud report forward, and the stern of the vessel lifted perceptibly. The bulkhead had given way, and there arose such yells, as surely were seldom heard before. To Roy's ears it seemed to shape itself into the words, "drowning"—*sinking*.

Out of the mighty depths of the ship poured the firemen, whose blackened faces added fresh terror to the panic-stricken throng. Aft they came, accompanied by a crowd of sailors and emigrants.

"Rush the boats," cried an Irishman, "or sure we'll be drowned!"

Taking the hint, the maddened mob burst towards the boats like an avalanche. In a moment the women and children, who were waiting to get in, were swept aside, and a determined effort to take possession was made.

"Tom," cried a sailor, who was holding on to the foremost tackle, "lower away, we shall be rushed and swamped."

Tom obeyed with the greatest alacrity, and down sank the boat below the level of the upper decks, just as the mob was getting the mastery, and they shoved off quickly from the ship's side. As they did so, the stern of the *Victoria* lifted right out of the water, so that they could see under her rudder-post. Many men jumped into the water and swam after the boat, clutching hold of the gunwale, and imploring to be taken in. Some were cruel enough to knock them off, in the fear that they would be upset; but, in most cases, they ran the risk, and dragged their drowning mates in.

The horrors on board the sinking ship were redoubling, for the steam fog-horn, which had been sounding continually all day, was now going like fury, trying to outdo the shrieks of the unhappy victims. Roy compared it to a thousand mad bulls. Every now and then rockets had been shot up, increasing in number as the fog lifted. It required all the

captain's authority and strength too, added to that of his first officer, to keep a large lifeboat from being filled with emigrant men—it was still hanging to the davits. While they were throwing in the women, Captain Paton saw three boys struggling with two men to get a place.

"Dick! Dick! is that you?" cried he.

"No, 'tain't Dick," was the answer, at the same time he heard close at hand the voice of Roy, exclaiming,

"Shame, men, shame! Are you turned into fiends? Will you let your captain's son perish? Hold on, Dick, don't kick."

The father flew to the rescue, and found Roy fighting his way with his arms round his boy, dragging him to the point where he could drop him into another boat, where there was only room for two more.

"Thanks, Royston—a thousand thanks. Men, have mercy on my boy!"

The grey dawn was slowly breaking, ushering in the last day of the noble ship, *Victoria*, and the last day and hour of many a soul on board. The peculiar light added to the intensity of that awful scene. Men and women locking speechless into each other's faces, reading in their horror-stricken countenances their own death-warrant written there.

"Captain Paton, go with your boy!" cried Roy. "You can do no good here," persisted he, as his suggestion was met with a firm refusal. "The vessel is rapidly sinking."

"And so am I," replied the captain, solemnly. "The *Victoria* and I end our voyage together. You go with Dick."

"Shall we meet in the same harbour, Captain Paton?" said Roy in a choked voice.

"Yes—yes," said the captain, in the same husky tone. "Thank God, yes. I followed false lights once, and was nearly getting shipwrecked; but the Great Light quenched the others. That little chap of yours has been a ray from that on board. It has done its work."

Another grasp of the hand, and the two men parted, never expecting to meet again in this world.

Roy was just upon the point of springing after Dick, when he was held back, and a voice cried,

"Are you married?"

"No," was the answer.

"Then in mercy let me go. I have a wife and ten children waiting for me in Jamaica."

"Go," said Roy, "and God preserve you."

The boat was still fastened to the ship by the bow tackle.

"A knife! A knife!" was the cry. "Cut the rope, or we shall drown with the vessel!"

The captain heard and rushed; but as he returned knife in hand, the steamer rolled to and fro.

"Quick—cut the rope!" called he, throwing it down. "Get away from the vessel, she's going!"

It was too late. The grand ship reared herself up on end, quite slowly, amidst despairing shrieks of the doomed on board. Her stern rose higher and higher—her bows plunged deeper and deeper.

The boat was sinking with the vessel, gradually being dragged down, when some of the occupants leaped into the foaming sea. Then it lurched, and some women and Dick were precipitated into the water. The captain saw it, and leaped from the bulwarks to save his boy. At the same moment a seaman sprang into the gap and managed to cut the rope. It gave a plunge, and Captain Paton received a blow on his head and sank.

"Let's go! We shall be sucked in if we don't!" cried several voices.

"Shan't take an oar till I see if he comes up again," said the sailor. "I've been six years with him, and I ain't a-going to let him drown like a pig with one knock on his head for all your squeaking. There he is again, as I told ye."

"He's dead—he is!" cried some women. "Save the living, men!"

"We're to save this one, dead or alive. Lend a hand, Jim. I've got him."

Many lent a hand, until the boat was nearly capsizing, and the body of the unfortunate Captain Paton was hauled in and consigned to the care of three ladies, to try and restore life into it.

They were wondering whether his eyes would ever open on his beautiful ship again, when she reared almost upright, nearly a hundred feet upon the water, as if in search of her captain, then bemoaning his fate and her own, and determined not to outlive him, she plunged down with a rapid and appalling rush, with a wrenching sound of breaking spars, and a loud explosion of her boilers, and a strange smothered boom of bursting bulkheads, down, down into those fathomless depths of ocean, to be seen no more for ever.

A quarter, or nearly half a mile away, was a small boat containing only three human beings—a man and two children, who were watching the scared faces and clasped hands, the fearful wreck of the *Victoria*.

Rays from the sun had pierced the mist, and striking full on the sinking ship, seemed to wrap her from hull to truck in a weird, unearthly light.

"Oh—look! Hark! what is that? Listen! Oh!" were the varied exclamations that escaped them, until the vessel reared on high, and they beheld her sinking.

"Fag! Fag!" they cried, jumping up in the cutter. "What is that falling from the masts?"

"Men going down to a watery grave," groaned the sailor, "where you and I would be now but for the mercy of the Almighty. Yes, let us praise Him, for many of my mates are there," and Fag took off his cap and stood up for a few moments with a long yearning look of agonizing sympathy

until the waters closed over where the *Victoria* had been boiling and foaming and sucking down everything in the path of her last journey, while the imprisoned air and steam came up in great hissing jets and bubbles, that exploded into spray on the surface.

"Rob," sobbed Dot, "where is dear Mr. Royston and Captain Paton?"

"In a boat, surely. Oh, Dot; don't even think that Roy is drowned after I have come out all this way to be with him. Fag, let us go back and see. Let us go and pick some of them up," and with a piercing cry, Rex called out, "Roy! R—o—y!"

"I'm only biding my time," said Fag. "If we were to go too near, we should get sucked in or blown up. This little craft ain't like a lifeboat, that could stand any amount of blows from heavy timber."

However, presently Fag turned the boat's head again.

"I thought I heard a cry," said Dot, and the two children called again at the top of their voices for Roy.

How terrible if he or any of the many victims heard it in their last moments—knew that succour was at hand too late to respond to it.

"There's something, Fag," cried Rex, in a few moments, pointing at a round boat-like object to the starboard of them. Surely there was a faint cry. The children called again and again. There seemed a slight response.

"It is only the echo of your own voices," cried Fag, "giving round."

Rex flew to the end of the boat.

"There's a hand!" he cried. "It's a man!" as they neared it. "An empty boat, floating topsy turvy. Yes, a man; and Dot—oh, Dot, it's Roy! Roy! R—o—y!"

They came up to the object. Yes, it was Roy, with a life-belt on, but almost unconscious, hanging to the boat quite helpless. At the sound of the children's screams of delighted

recognition, he opened his eyes, and a faint smile was perceptible as he murmured, "Thank God!"

Rex was about springing into the water, when Fag ordered him back.

"You stay where you are, and lend a hand from that point. Now, Mr. Royston, grasp this rope."

"I could not have held on five minutes longer," was the reply.

"You just catch hold of the loop, sir, that's easy work. Let go the gunwale and put both your arms in. No, young master, he'll do it without your trying to drown yourself. Come here and help haul him round. Take care, missy, you don't get pulled over. You can lend a hand, it will keep ye from getting a chill."

The loved, familiar voices seemed to lend new strength to Roy, and in a few moments Fag, with his sailor's knack and power, landed him like a child into the boat, where, wet as he was, he was received with hugs and kisses, enough to take away what little breath was left in his body. He could only ejaculate,

"Saved a second time. Dear children. What a mercy is this! Ah, old man, I feared you were in that lost boat."

"We were amongst an awful set," said Fag; "each one bent on saving their own lives, even at the expense of the rest. Two men and a woman came along in this boat. Where the rest had gone goodness knows. They wanted to come in, thinking it safer and more the merrier. Strikes me they fancied we had more rum aboard; and they were not far out. Many of our crew had had too much already, and it was not so safe for these youngsters, so I offered to change places."

"Thank you, Fag, and so will their fathers in a more substantial way. Your thought for them was providential indeed, for it has led to saving my life. Is there any chance, think you, that others may be yet alive on yonder wreck? Some on a raft, perhaps."

"I was on my way to see," was the answer.

They rowed up to the spot where the gallant *Victoria* had breathed her last; but there was not a living creature to be seen—nothing but the rising and falling of the great waves over the *débris*. They shouted, and once or twice thought they heard a faint voice in return; but when they reached the spot only wreckage met their view.

"There is an oar. You may try and fish it up with this hook-stick," said Fag to Rex. "We may want it. It may come in handy."

There were some tin cases, whether of biscuits or meat they knew not. They captured many useful articles, and might have had more, only Fag said it was better to have the boat as light as possible, he being single handed at present.

"Oh—look! Land! Land!"

The sun was shining brilliantly now, dispersing the mist, which had again gathered, and now the occupants of the boat beheld a lovely panorama, as if it had arisen out of the sea—a sandy shore, then gentle slopes of grassy banks, and still higher, a wood or plantation of trees.

"It must be a mirage," said Roy. "Can't believe we're near land."

"That's land! It's no mirage!" said Fag. "Thank God, it is real land! I thought we were two days off anything like sand and earth, let alone trees. I believe it has come down from Heaven, or called up from the deep for the sake of these poor children."

"Let us make haste and go to it," cried Rex. "It looks like the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"Oh, wait," called Dot. "Look, there's the great hen-coop that was on the lower deck, where I used to go and feed the chickens every morning."

"Yes, I see it," said Fag. "It is coming this way, and will do to cover you in to-night."

"Cover me!" exclaimed Dot. "I am not a fowl!"

"No; but you are a little bird that has to be kept from night chills. There is really room enough to admit us all to dinner; but Mr. Royston will agree with me, that the best thing to do is to cover it over to-night, and then you two youngsters will be sheltered. There is plenty of sacking at the bottom of the boat."

In less than an hour they reached the sandy shore. For Royston had considerably revived, and would assist at bringing in the boat.

"Do not run away, children. We will all go together," said Roy, "and see if this island is inhabited."

"I doubt it," said Fag. "I see no signs of man's footstep, and better be without them, perhaps, unless they are of the right sort."

There could scarcely be a prettier place, with its rich banks of flowers, feathery bamboos, and silvery fall, trickling through a fernery of frail, shivering beauty. They emerged from an avenue of bamboos to enter another, arched over by the fronds of magnificent tree-ferns, that seemed to grow everywhere. At one moment they were looking up at their rough, fibrous stems, the next they were looking down into their very hearts.

They hurried to the nearest hill and looked round. For, of course, reached it first, and called out,

"I don't see a single house!"

"I did not expect to see any," said Fag. "I think it is one of several small uninhabited islands, not many miles from the larger ones. It is all hill and valley—no particular land for tilling, not flat enough. Ah! what is that!"

"What!" cried the children. "A wild beast?"

"No; something to be thankful for. Look—do you see through the central valley a twisting thread of green?"

"Yes, I do," said Roy; "darker than the surrounding foliage."

"Yes. Well that shows a stream of fresh water, if I am

not mistaken, and that's a mercy, I can tell you. That 'breaker' of water would not hold out long for four people; but, 'little admiral,' don't you be up to any larks with it, or drinking it for fun, until I have been to make quite sure. Mr. Royston, they can come with me. You had better go and get a rub down in the sun while your clothes dry, and then we will have some breakfast. You need some hot coffee, sir."

"Breakfast and hot coffee does not sound like a desert island, does it, Rob? Not like those I have read about. There are not any savages."

"No, thank the Lord," said Fag. "I'd have soon turned the boat's head clean away from that gentry."

"Oh, Mr. Fag; have you really seen wild savages, dressed in paint and feathers?"

"Yes, missy, I have, and had their poisoned arrows flying after me, as we took to our boats."

"Oh; how awful!" cried Dot. "As bad as a bear?"

"Yes, it was; but listen to the end, children. Five years after we were off the same island, when some natives came running along the shore, throwing branches of palm into the water to signify peace; and then they waved some more, and a party put off in a canoe with a message from the chief, that we should pay a visit to him, which we did—I must say the most of us with great misgiving; but there, to our surprise, we found them Chief and all, 'clothed and in their right minds,' sitting at the feet of Jesus, all the work of one faithful missionary. I was looking forward to paying them another visit, for I hear they have a little church of their own, and a native preacher."

"I should like to have gone with you," said Roy, turning away to take the sailor's advice. "I say, how are you going to give us coffee, hot? By the sun's rays? I had matches, but they are all soaked."

"I have them in a tin," replied Fag.

"I am just going with the children to see how far they may venture alone. I want to see what that bowl to the right is, for it may be dangerous."

They hastened down a velvet slope, through a winding glen, overshadowed by brown-red rocks, tipped with cane; then a narrow fissure, feathered with evergreen foliage, and opening into a bowl of close and thick vegetation.

"Ah! I am glad to see that, I feared it might be a mud-lake, which, if you once get into, you never get out. Don't go down into that hollow alone though, for there may be snakes; but it does not do always to be thinking you are treading on a snake. Halloo, lassie, what's up?"

Dot had sprung back with a little cry.

"Strings across my face. What is it? Thick, sticky strings."

"It is the thread of the golden spider; its web looks beautiful in the sun, and so does the busy spinner."

"I hate spiders—nasty ugly things," said Dot. "I never see any beauty in them. I am sure the trees would rather be without those cords across, though they are golden."

"I dare say the birds would," said Fag. "The little ones are often caught in the webs. Look across the valley," said Fag, presently.

"Oh, how lovely!" they cried.

Silver clouds were resting on the hills, or hanging above, casting fitful shadows on upland and valley. A hundred varying shades gave colour to the landscape, and over all the blue sky in perfect harmony, with the green tints of earth blending with the sparkling sea into one bright frame for the beautiful island.

Suddenly a whirring sound broke the silence.

"Look, children—look!" cried Fag. "There is a 'purple carib' as it is called here—the humming-bird."

Yes, there was the sweet little creature hovering over a flowering vine. The two clapped their hands with delight.

"We have one under a glass-case at home," cried Rex. "I never believed there were any alive."

After every plunge into a flower, he retired to a favourite branch, pluming his velvet-black feathers and shook his wings, until their metallic green and the deep purple of the throat flashed again and again. His resting-place was a magnolia tree, and the dark shining leaves formed a lovely frame for the dainty *oiseau-mouche*.

He looked like a living gem, set in green enamel and diamond sprays.

"You can remain here and watch the birds," said Fag, presently, after he had run up an eminence and come back again; but mind, do not go further on by yourselves. I want to see after Mr. Royston and breakfast. There's lots to be done before night."

"Why, it is only just morning," said Dot, laughing. "Night won't come again for a long time."

"It will be on ye before you can say 'Jack Robinson,' when once the sun goes down. Where are you going to sleep, little missy, eh?"

"I should like to be a fairy, and nestle in the nest of the humming-bird," said Dot.

"And that's just what ye look like," said the sailor, as he glanced at the sunny little face, across which the sun was glinting.

Rex wondered what would he think of Dot when her hair was down, for at present it was tied up in a queer knot, which, somehow, did not deteriorate from the lovely dimpled features. As the sailor turned away, Rex said,

"Dottie, dear. When the 'General' came out of any fighting unhurt, the first thing he did was to thank God. Shan't we?"

"Yes; let us," replied Dot; "but don't think I've waited till now, Robin. I knew Jesus was on the sea, keeping our boat from sinking, like some of the others, and I was thanking

Him all the time for saving us together. He joined our hands and He did not let the waves 'sunder' us; and, oh, Hubby, dear, was it not Jesus's hand that kept dear Mr. Royston hanging on to the boat? He caught him just like He did Peter, as he was beginning to sink."

The two knelt down, and poured out from their hearts, praise for their wonderful preservation. Rex, of course, commenced, and was surprised when Dot began, where he left off, in sweet poetical language. He little thought how much of it emanated from his own teaching.

The "purple carib" bent his emerald neck, astonished at the novel sight; and thousands of birds seemed to join in a rich chorale of praise that the two shipwrecked little mortals had been saved, and landed on their island home.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE ISLAND.

AS the children slowly returned, chattering about first one strange sight, then another, running up and down the flowery banks, making the hills echo with their laughter, Roy and Fag paused in their work to listen.

"Aye, aye, sir. These children's voices were just what was wanted to give a finish to the bright picture of this greenest of green isles of the sea."

Yes, Fag was right, and so thought Roy, as he looked towards the wreckage, and a soft *Te Deum* was playing in his heart at the idea of the terrible "might have beens." How those merry voices might have been hushed beneath, instead of thus saved above it. Yes, what the flowers were to the island, the stream to the valley, the birds to the air, and the sun's rays to all, were the happy child-tones to the surrounding scene, gladdening everything in accord with each, and freshening with rippling music the fragrant uplands :

" Ah ! what would the world be to us,
If the children came no more ?
We should dread the desert behind us
More than the dark before."

A very spicy aroma made itself known as they sprang down from the bank.

"Coffee!" they cried. "Hot coffee! Oh, how wonderful!"

"That did not grow here," said Dot, jumping round it.

"Yes; but it did just," said Fag.

"What, hot coffee spring out of the ground! No, I won't believe that."

"I see," said Rex, "there's a hot spring somewhere close to the coffee trees, and the berries fell into the boiling water, and it has bubbled up steaming coffee!"

"And what apparatus underground do you think performed the feat of grinding the berries?" laughed Roy, who was busy opening a tin. "Perhaps there are some magic hands beneath, like in Jules Verne's 'Deserted Island,' which even sent up quinine at the needed moment. In our case it is condensed milk and a tin of biscuits. Come along, children—come along, Fag."

"Oh, Fag, what are you doing? Are there a lot of fowls on the island that you have put the hen-coop here—and actually covering it over? Are you afraid of their catching cold?" cried Dot and Rex, jumping round the man in fits of laughter.

"It is for two 'chickens' I'm rigging up this, who are not accustomed to sleep on desert islands, and I don't think a house will spring up for them like the hot coffee."

"It is for us!" "It's for us!" cried the children, making their way inside. "Oh, what a dear old Fag you are; but you shan't do a thing more till you've had breakfast," and they dragged him to the spot, where the little tin kettle was steaming away, and made him sit down, but not before Roy had returned a hearty thanksgiving for their preservation and continued care.

The breakfast had been placed under another spreading magnolia, in front of a raised bank, against which Roy felt it very restful to lean, for though more comfortable in his dry clothes, he still looked white.

"I don't know anything so invigorating as coffee," said he. "I shall be able to help you build a house presently, Fag."

"It would not do to go in for coffee all day though, even if we had it, sir. The great heat makes you long for cooler drinks, such as 'swizzles.' That's a particular concoction of some of the islands in the Indies. It's a deliciously cold drink, of a delicate pink colour, and when lashed into a foam with a small branch called a 'swizzle-stick,' it makes a splendid drink."

"When do they drink it? At meals?"

"I don't know when they're not drinking it. It's taken in the morning to ward off the effect of chill, before breakfast to give a 'tone,' they call it, to the system. Then in middle-day to fortify against the heat. For the afternoon as a suitable finale to luncheon, as a stimulant to low spirits, and soothe ye for losses. Before dinner it acts as an appetizer, and when taken before going to bed, sends you to sleep. So, you see, it's going on all day and all night."

The two had finished their meal, and Dot had perched herself under the hen-coop like a veritable fowl, which made Rex offer her biscuit through the openings. Tarpaulin was placed underneath and above, together with palm leaves. When the heat of the day was abated, they saw Fag and Roy bearing poles, and Rex was delighted to lend assistance. Four stout forked poles were worked into the ground, then more were placed across and covered, too, with tarpaulin. Rex and Dot had been shown by Fag an eminence, against the sides of which grew the stately palm, and the plantain. The branches were thus easily reached, and the children ran to and fro with them. To their surprise, on one of their return journeys, they saw Roy and Fag in the boat, rowing towards the wreck. They had seen several things floating, and not knowing whether they were bodies of the unfortunate victims, or furniture and *débris* of luggage and cargo, hastened off during the children's absence, as Rex would have been sure to want to accompany them, and they were better on land than see the sights that might be awaiting them.

Roy waved to them, and they stood and watched and wondered, and hoped that they would bring back no end of things.

Ah, who would have thought that anything so dreadful could have happened on those deep, blue waters, where the silvery waves were laughing and dancing. It was not long before the lovely rose pink gathered in the sky. Suddenly there was a low whistle. The children started round expecting to see someone approaching.

"I believe it is you, Robin," said Dot, when they failed to see anyone.

Rex shook his head, and put up his finger.

"Hush! there it is again!" this time accompanied by a croak, then a chorus.

They walked in the direction of the sounds, and looking over a bank into some large pools, saw that the noise proceeded from a large company of frogs. They were greeted with a varied chorus from the deepest guttural notes: "Awuk, awank, awunk," roared the bass; "week, weak, wick," piped the tenor; "cree, cre, c.u," screamed the soprano; and the full choir joined in a refrain, which rose and fell with the breeze. Three quaint little fellows had a most peculiarly sweet whistle, which had been the first to salute Dot's ears. They were amused enough with the frogs; but nothing could exceed their delight in watching a small party of the "calling crabs," as they waved and beckoned with their great claws, and then if either Rex or Dot made the least attempt to approach them, scurried away, often in their fright missing their holes; then in despair placed themselves in a fighting attitude, as if daring them to the attack.

In the midst of their entertainment, a most appalling sound issued from the valley, coming nearer through the wood. Our hero and heroine started to their feet, crying, "What's that?" and looking into each other's faces for the answer.

"Come away," said Rex, giving her a pull.

"Where to?" cried Dot, with reason, for if they went north, they would face the terrific enemy, and if they ran south there was only the sea.

Now the noise resembled the bellowing of a cow, who had lost her calf.

"I wish Fag were here. I wish Roy had not gone with him," cried Rex.

Then came the prolonged howl of a wild animal.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Dot, clasping her hands, and looking north, south, east, and west for some harbour of refuge. "Here are your wild beasts at last. How wicked for you ever to wish for them. I wish I had been drowned. I would rather have been drowned twice over than killed by a lion."

Rex thought so would he, rather than see Dot's agony of mind, and not know how to face the inevitable. The present aspect of fighting wild beasts was certainly not enviable.

The repetition of sundry howls made Dot fly to the sea, and scream with all her might. Rex followed her with some forlorn hope of protecting her, when his eye fell on the small boat, to which Roy was found clinging, and which had been pulled in with them. There were two oars, which Fag had placed there from the larger boat.

"Get in, get in," cried Rex, "we can manage to get it to move. I can row and you can punt. Somehow we can get it away from the land."

Dot sprang into the boat, as another terrific bellowing and howling came from behind the nearest trees.

"It must be tigers fighting," said Rex, seizing on the oar with such vigour as he uttered the comforting suggestion, that he nearly turned head over heels; but by means of violent plunging, and with the assistance of the tide that was going out, the boat floated from the land, as again the howl reached them, a little more distant, which somewhat quieted two beating hearts. Nevertheless, they were determined not to return to land until their protectors came back.

"How I wish we could row to them," moaned Dot. "They seem miles away."

The rose-pink in the west was changing to gold. A metallic lustre danced on the water, and far distant land looked like a thick purple cloud.

"That's a dog," cried Rex, as a bark seemed to echo over the waves.

"It does sound like it," said Dot, rejoicing in the human civilized sound.

"I believe they have found a dog. How jolly; but I do wish they had saved some of the passengers."

The bark indeed was that of a dog, and none other than that of Captain Paton's. The animal was standing on a huge piece of the bulkhead, and was overjoyed at the sight of the two men. He was a large retriever, and they wondered he had not attempted to swim ashore; but when they rowed up alongside the floating wood, he never attempted to jump into the boat, but looked up into their faces with a strange wistful expression, and pulled their sleeves, at last attracting them to a plank, upon which there was a small fox terrier, who, with his nose between his front paws, was gazing down into the silent depths, watching, waiting, watching for "the touch of a vanished hand," for a voice that was for ever still. He greeted them with a piteous howl, which was echoed by the retriever, clearly saying, "Help him if you can." Roy offered them biscuit, which was gratefully accepted by the latter; but the other refused it, drinking a little fresh water that Fag gave them.

There were two hammocks caught in the *débris*, and no end of shawls, which were hauled into the boat, also small, light tins.

"Now then, Diver, we're off," said Roy.

The retriever sprang into the boat, then leaped out again up to his small companion, evidently pleading with him to come too; but his suggestion was evidently scorned, and the

watchful yearning eyes were bent on the deep blue waters, waiting for the master he was never to see again. Diver even pulled his ears, which was equally unavailing, so he jumped back into the boat.

"I quite think Captain Paton is saved," said Fag, "or his dog would never have left the wreck. He saw him go off in a boat, and that's why he comes with us—eh, old boy?"

The dog wagged his tail, and manifested great joy as they rowed back.

"I am longing to hear of his safety," said Roy. "He was a brave man, and fitted for his post in every way."

"Aye, that he was. Never had a captain I liked so well," replied the sailor.

They sank into silence. The sight of the wreck turned Roy white and faint. Suddenly he looked up.

"Why, surely that's a boat some little distance from the shore!"

Fag had his back to it and turned.

"It's the little boat, and those youngsters of yours are in it. I never thought of telling them not to get into it."

"Hark! surely that was a scream!" said Roy.

"Don't think there's anything there to scream about," said Fag. "I expect it's a parrot you heard."

"No; that is Dot," said Roy.

The two men rowed in quickly, when the most appalling howls saluted their ears, followed by distinct screams from Dot.

"We are like the Israelites," said Rex—"enemies flying down upon us from the back, and only the sea in front."

"They had the lovely pillar-cloud," said Dot. "I would have gone anywhere after that."

"Well, a boat has been sent us instead of a cloud, and we are in it, and getting farther away every minute," said Rex, practically.

"But the tigers can swim after us. We are such a little

way out," sobbed Dot, as another ominous sound came from the thick trees and on to the deep blue sea, shot with purple and gold.

Rex pulled with all his might, and under his direction, Dot made frantic efforts to propel their little craft beyond the region of the wild beasts, whom they expected every moment to appear on the grassy, sandy shore. Their movements looked so warlike, and they scanned the horizon so eagerly, as if they were bent on charging the ball of the setting sun. Great was their delight when they heard themselves called, and instead of a tiger, Fag and Roy were close at hand.

"What's the matter? Why are you in the boat? Are you having a fight with the parrots?" said they.

"It isn't parrots. There's a wild beast," cried Dot.

"Come alongside here," called Fag, "and if we see anything we don't like, you two can jump into our boat and off we will go. But I must land first and get my gun and powder."

"No, no; you must not get killed for us, Mr. Fag. Let us all keep here together, till we see what kind of beast it is."

"Oh, there it is!"

"Where is it?" screamed she, as a fearful bellow came through the first trees, and appeared right over her head, causing her to throw herself down in the boat in terror.

"There's your wild beast in the air," cried Fag, shouting with laughter, leaping into the little boat, and catching up frightened Dot in his arms. "Look at its bald head."

"Do you really mean to say that awful cry emanated from that small bird?" asked Roy in amazement.

"It's bellowing like a cow that has lost her calf," said Rex, looking up at the creature, who, with its plumage of olive colour, flew over their heads two or three times, and then disappeared.

"Now that's a most extraordinary thing," cried Fag, throwing down his cap, and rubbing the parting of his hair.

two fingers, which he invariably did when extremely puzzled. "That's the 'calf-bird' of Guiana; but I have never known of their being here. Some of them must have been brought over. Had I been there, I should have recognized their cry; but never expected to hear it in this latitude. I don't wonder at little missy being alarmed. Many grown-up men have thought they were in the region of wild animals, upon first hearing it. I hope, lassie, you will never hear any sound more harmful than that. I am right glad I've heard it, Mr. Royston, for inhabited islands may not be far distant—I mean civilized islands; it is only travellers who would bring those birds hither. Now let us make our houses for the night. You shall have a hammock, young lady, to-morrow night. These shall dry in the sun in the morning."

The hen-coop was nearly completed; but Fag was more anxious about the protection from the ground damp, from night dews, or the inroads of large insects or small snakes. With tarpaulin, leaves, and other things, he managed very cleverly, so the two children were made as secure and comfortable as possible, though Rex was found sitting outside like a sentinel, in case of any sudden appearance or sound of wild beasts, which might frighten Dot; but, as Fag told him that he and Mr. Royston had pulled up the little boat on shore, close by, and were to occupy it that night, he yielded and joined Dot in the hen-coop. She was fast asleep on Rex's coat and the wrap that Roy had thrown over her at the first alarm, and which had been in the sun all day, so was soft and warm. The boy thought how cosy he would make her next day with all the shawls and things brought from the wreck, and then he threw himself down on some sacking with a pillow, which he first hugged and kissed. It was only a rough canvas bag; but, ah! what was its stuffing?—nothing less than his Testament and the "General," saved all through Fag, who one day said to him,

"Look here, 'little admiral,' I've made a case for those books of yours that that plague of a Dick is always trying to steal from you. You hide them away in this, and then they will be ready in case of alarm of fire or shipwreck."

The sailor had spoken half in jest, and Rex little thought how it contained "a truth spoken." How he thought of it though when it all came to pass, and when he swung the leather strap that bound it over his head in those terrible moments. No wonder he nestled his head on it, as the softest pillow you could have given him.

There was a grand full moon that night, lighting up the island with its soft, silver radiance, wonderfully increasing its romantic beauty, and defining more clearly the outlines of the palm groups.

Frank Royston stood silently contemplating the majestic beauty of the silver-crested waves, that were rolling towards him, each chiming its own sad story of the wreck they had passed, and of the moans breathed out on the night air by the one faithful watcher, who was pouring forth his piteous cry to the moon, as if asking that its rays might draw up the form of the loved and lost.

Suddenly Roy felt his hand taken and kissed. It was Dot, and of course Rex was on the other side, with his arm through his, and his curly head resting lovingly there. He had never heard them creep up to him. He thought they were fast asleep, and they did not speak. The whole scene wore a strange aspect of unreality, heightened by the extreme quiet, which so impressed the little couple—no doubt the wonderful contrast from that terrific scene through which they had passed. Would it not leave its indelible mark behind?

"I am so glad you are safe," said Dot at last, with a little sob in her voice, while Rex gave him one of his hugs. "You have been so good to us, and so has God. He might have punished us for all we have done, especially coming after you

as we did. We might have been drowned and eaten up by some great sea monster ; or swallowed before we were drowned, or dashed against some rocks and broken to bits, and left to be starved to death, instead of saving us over and over again, and landing us in this beautiful island."

Dot finished off with such a burst of tears, that Roy took her up in his arms, that the tried little nerves might find soothing rest on his shoulder.

Rex had not spoken ; but he saw that his eyes were fixed on the wreck, and that they were brimful of tears.

A few days passed. A continual fog or mist hung over the sea, and prevented their rowing round the island to ascertain their whereabouts. Fag had expected to see a steamer from one of the islands following in the wake of the lost one ; and had put up a high pole with a flag at the top, hoping that it would be seen, as most likely one or more of the boats might have taken the news of the wreck to an inhabited island, and they would be on the look-out for survivors. But to his surprise, whenever the fog lifted, there was not any vessel in sight, or any fog signals when the mist fell. On the island it was clear and beautiful, and many were the hours they spent in exploring and discovering new beauties, and none more lovely than the peculiar hollows or holes, about three feet deep, near the stream, entirely lined with the graceful maiden-hair fern. This delicate species gave a special charm to the island, as it grew luxuriously on the rocks and small caves. If there could possibly be anything hard, it was sure to be draped with its soft fragile fronds.

Suddenly they came upon a spot where there was not a single fern. Rex thought it very funny. He was a great admirer of them, his eye having been trained to their beauty from his babyhood, Sir Roland being celebrated in the county for his growth of ferns and cacti.

"Now, why are there not any here, I should like to know?" cried his boy, putting his head into every crevice. "Here is

a fat, leafy thing, tearing about everywhere, whether the place is wet or dry, and why can't the ferns? This stupid old thing seems to be running a race with all the other plants, and winning it too, poking its claws everywhere."

"Ah, 'little admiral,' don't call it stupid, it's wiser than we are," said Fag. "That's the life-plant, and where the ferns won't grow for some queer reason, best known to themselves, there this life-plant flourishes."

"I am glad to have seen it," said Roy, taking a cluster into his hand. "I have often heard and read of it, and longed to have ocular demonstration of its extraordinary powers."

"Aye, aye, sir, that you will. You put a single leaf of that on the small rock near the hen-coop, and——"

"I think you might call that the drawing-room," interrupted Dot. "You have made it so beautiful on purpose for me, that I won't be treated as a fowl any longer."

"Very well, little 'bantam,'" replied the sailor, laughing. "It shall be called the 'dovecot,' where you pair of 'doves' can coo over the 'ark,' as I heard ye this morning."

"Oh, Fag, it is very mean to listen," cried Dot, holding her finger up at him in a threatening manner.

"Yes," echoed Rex. "Listeners never hear any good of themselves."

"That's true enough, 'admiral.' I heard a lot against me."

"Fag!" "Fag!" cried both at once, "how can you say such a thing? We never spoke about you at all. If we had, it would have been to say how good and kind you are to us. We were only talking over the Bible while we were learning it."

"Well, I'm in the Bible, and I heard ye spinning a long yarn all against me."

"Oh, Fag, you are very naughty this morning! You are telling such fibs!" said Dot. "Your name is no more in the Bible than Mr. Royston's is!"

"Mine is there too," whispered Roy.

"My name is not spelt your way in the Bible, youngsters. It's s-i-n-n-e-r there, and that's me; and I heard a lot more about myself than I knew before. Now, go down to your 'dovecot,' and put one or two leaves in the crevices of that piece of rock near, and then look at it in a few days. I expect you'll spin another long yarn then."

And so they did, for in a few days it was full of life, each separate leaf sending out shoots from its edges, with perfect indifference as to its changed abode.

"What wonderful vitality!" said Roy, who had been watching it daily with the same keen interest as the children.

"Jolly little plucky leaves," said Rex. "I suppose Fag means we are little leaves, that must send forth shoots wherever we go, and——"

"And cover up the bare places in other people's lives, that are all hard and rough," interrupted romantic, poetical Dot. "That's what you have done to mine, Robin—made it all beautiful."

"Made you beautiful, you conceited little 'bantam,'" said Rex.

"No; you could never do that; but since you found me in the 'Haunted House,' where I was only like this rock, hard and cold and bare, you have been to my life like these lovely deep-green, fleshy leaves have to the stone—made it soft and green, twining over the rugged bits. Mr. Royston will know what I mean."

"Yes," said Roy, who had pretended not to listen, and who was chinking how one little fleshy leaf had sent out shoots, that had entered the crevices of his own heart, causing the beginning of a new and endless life.

It was about eight o'clock that evening, the mist had cleared and the moon was shining brilliantly, when Fag called out,

"Don't you 'doves' go to roost yet. Come along with

Mr. Royston and me, and I'll show you something worth seeing."

The "doves" were delighted at the idea of seeing anything fresh.

Roy left off mending his hammock. He and Fag had quite comfortable quarters now, and contemplated building a house in time for the rainy season, many months hence; but they expected to be rescued before that time came.

Fag had cleared away a quantity of brushwood, and now led them through a new path to a portion of the island they had not yet visited.

"Oh, what a lovely perfume!" cried Roy, presently.

"Oh, how delicious!" exclaimed Rex. "It must be pineapple. It is getting stronger every minute."

Then they came upon clusters of pale flowers, at that hour coming into bloom, the *cereus grandiflora* or night cactus, running in wild profusion over trees and bushes.

"The scent is quite overpowering," said Roy, "and reminds one of that lovely *Reine de nuit*, with its long white petals filled with a shower of gold, which only open after sunset."

"This is in perfection at midnight," said Fag. "Do you know, sir, I think that moon is telling us that there will not be any fog to-morrow?"

And so it proved. Rex was very anxious to accompany Fag on his journey round the island in the little boat, and remained awake for that purpose, continually thinking it daylight when it was only the moon. At last she set, and the darkness was complete. Soon after, a few cries of birds began to break the silence of night, perhaps indicating that signs of dawn were perceptible in the eastern horizon. A little later the melancholy voice of a certain bird, like the note of the "goatsucker," was heard, varied with the croaking of frogs, which evidently had a soothing effect on our hero, for the next thing that dawned upon his senses was the odour of coffee, and jumping up, he perceived Roy arranging breakfast,

who began laughing at him for sleeping so many hours. Had Fag gone? Gone! Yes, and would soon be back. And sure enough, before the fish was cooked, that worthy made his appearance.

"Well, the fog clearance has not shown me much," said Roy. "Not a ship in sight."

"It's lifted to show me something though," replied Fag, "and that is, that if we remain this side of the island, we are likely to die here before any vessel will see our signal. As far as I can make out, we must be located on a back island of one of the "Caribs," and we landed on the north of it instead of the south. It will be clearer still to-morrow, I guess, so we will all walk across. Now that I have made the short cut it will be quicker than rowing. Now, 'admiral,' I want to give you some real lessons in rowing. N., Diver, not you. Your arms had better be ready for action, Mr. Royston, so will you come to the wreck?"

Fag had never failed, during the intervals of the fog-lifting, to go after the little dog, and try to induce him to come away or to eat. Each day the visit was more painful. Fag had tied a tin of fresh water in the hollow of a piece of bulkhead, that seemed fixed somehow, and some biscuit; but they remained nearly untouched. The sailor tried to feed him, and the little animal would perhaps take a drink of water and a scrap of food as if to please him, then he would turn up his great sunken eyes, full of tears, too weak to howl. He gave piteous cries, that were heartrending to hear, licked his hand, and then fastened his gaze, with despairing agony, down into the deep blue waters, yearning to penetrate the lowest depths.

"I shall try and bring him away with me," said Roy. "Perhaps he will be too weak to resist."

"You had better not attempt it, sir, in his state just now; he might give you a bite that might be very dangerous, and mind you, youngsters, let him alone."

"Ah, there he is, just in the same place," said Rex, as they neared the wreck, "his nose between his paws just as usual."

No, not just as usual. The head was indeed in the same position, the ears were even raised in anxious expectation; but the loving eyes were glazed, and the devoted little heart of the lone watcher of the deep was still for evermore.

Dot burst into tears.

"He has died of a broken heart, he has," cried she, clasping her hands; while Rex could scarcely restrain the tears from coming into his eyes.

Nothing would do but a proper funeral for so faithful a dog, and it was conveyed on shore.

Roy wondered why Fag was so particular about the rowing that day, telling him continually where he failed, taking out his watch and counting the strokes, seeming disappointed at Rex not being able to pull in a more vigorous manner.

"There's a box floating," said Dot, "so of course it is empty. It will do to bury poor Snap in."

It was not empty, however, for it contained something very valuable.

"Guess what it is," said Roy. "I would rather have it than a precious stone."

Various were the guesses as to the treasure, and there was a great shout of laughter when Roy tossed out some soap and a comb, which Dot seized on with delight, and immediately took off her hat and began combing her hair; but she was told to put her hat on again immediately, as the sun was becoming powerful. There were also some tins of cocoa, and three of lucifer matches.

"Something new for breakfast and supper," said Fag.

"We can have a variety this morning," said Dot. "Soap, cocoa, and lucifer matches."

"And a very charming variety too," added Roy. "Soap will make us look beautiful, cocoa will strengthen us, and phosphorus is good for 'ain."

"We need not mind letting the fire out now with all these matches," said Rex. "I may have a few now—jolly!"

"No you won't, please," said Fag. "We don't want the island set on fire, though we are surrounded by water. I shall bury those tins until we want them."

"Do you think that by putting them in the earth lots of little lucifer matches will come up?" enquired Dot, mischievously.

"Look here, you monkeys," called Fag, "do you see that blue and silver crescent in the water, close ashore?"

"Yes; we see."

"Well, there's a better dinner for ye there than soap and lucifer matches. That's a shoal of sardines."

And a splendid dinner they had. Fag had the day before found some cross-bar wire floating, which he turned into a gridiron.

Rex and Dot were half-asleep in the 'dovecot' during the heat of the day, when Dot felt little bits of stick fall on her face, small pieces of moss, etc.

"Don't, Rob, you will have my eyes out."

"Don't what?" returned he. "I am not doing anything."

"Yes, you are."

"No, I'm—— Halloo, what's that!" as a small shower of berries was shot into his face. "It must be Roy."

No. Roy and Fag were fast asleep in their hammocks. Suddenly a tiny hand came round the aperture, and then the wee face of a monkey, with two bright eyes like beads, peeped round the corner.

"A monkey!" cried Rex, starting forward, which so frightened it, that it scampered off with Rex after it.

Diver looked up, and gave a low-grunt at the extraordinary animal he had never seen; but before he had made up his mind whether he should bark at it, he had gone off to sleep. He was far too well-trained and well-bred to bark at nothing, or at anything so peculiar.

Dot ran too, begging Rex to catch the new toy. Up went the monkey up a palm tree, and up went Rex after it, so high, that Dot grew frightened, and her calls awakened Fag.

"What's up there?"

"Oh, there is a dear little monkey, quite a mite, and it has run up that palm tree, and Rob has gone after it."

"Come down directly, sir. You are quite monkey enough without going after one. I should have thought you had enough climbing on board the *Victoria*, and that that day up the mast would have been sufficient for your enquiring mind, for one lifetime. Cling to those lower branches, then back again to the tree, and slide down. Yes, Mr. Royston, that boy of yours will never be happy until he has broken his neck. He could not have done a more dangerous thing. The monkey might have thrown cocoa-nuts down on you, and given you concussion of the brain. Why, if he has not gone up again, just as he had lowered himself to that large upper branch. We have no doctor here, so we can't afford to run risks."

"I have him all right, Fag. I've grabbed him. I thought I might hurt him. Look out, Roy, I am going to slide down," and very soon he was at his side, exhibiting the little baby monkey, for so it appeared.

"Rob, I wish you would be more careful, lad. You will meet with a serious accident if you don't look out."

"Why should I? General Havelock climbed a tree at seven after eggs."

"At seven o'clock?" enquired Roy, maliciously.

"No, at seven years old—years younger than me—and when the branches fell with him, he said afterwards that he had no time to be frightened, he had enough to do to take care of the nest. He thought the eggs would be smashed to pieces."

Dot was making rapid friends with the monkey by offering him biscuit, and which he seemed to enjoy immensely.

"There seems a lovely breeze on the water," said Fag. "I think, if you are quite agreeable, Mr. Royston, we had better row to the other side of the island, for there are overhanging trees nearly all the way."

Roy was rather surprised at Fag changing his mind again, but was quite willing either to walk or row. So all six started in the small boat, for Diver and the monkey were of the party, the latter finding a most comfortable house in a little rescued basket.

Though Fag had manufactured a sail out of some floating canvas, he did not unfurl it, but depended on the rowing, even keeping Rex well employed. It was deliciously cool under the low hanging trees and shrubs of richest foliage, upon which were several species of brilliant beetles, and no end of exquisite butterflies, some of the richest azure blue, others with black velvet ground, and golden green bands of a silky lustre, and black tail. Then, on the same leaf, flew one with dark bands and crimson spots. Sometimes the boat glided under almost an arch of green, the island forming a crescent on that side—quite a little bay, where the wind and waves seemed stilled. The lattice work of foliage scarcely veiled the laughing sea and bright blue sky, while the hues of the landscape found their climax in the dazzling radiance of the sun upon the waves, and the pure light of the horizon. Nature was holding a never-ending festival and dance, in which the waves and shadows and sunbeams joined.

"Now stop," said Fag, at last, "we have arrived on the other side of the island. What do you see on the verge of the horizon, Mr. Royston?"

"Blue, pink, and purple clouds," said Roy; while Dot clapped her hands, and said it was real fairyland. She was sure she should see the fairies soon.

"Those are not clouds," answered the sailor. "If we had a glass, you would perceive the hills fringed with sugar-cane

and cocoa-nut trees, and the road of sea lies beyond that island, unless I am much mistaken. That is why we have not seen any vessels. We might catch sight of one far in the western horizon, but not in the eastern. We must change our quarters to-morrow."

The children were sorry to hear that, they were beginning to be very fond of their little nest on the other side; but when they found that the hen-coop and all their belongings were to be transplanted, and that numerous signals were to be invented, they were quite reconciled to it.

The sunset that evening surpassed in colouring any that even Fag had ever witnessed. As they looked towards the west, they were fairly dazzled by the rich lights in sky and water. An arch of dead gold spanned a dip in the far distant purple hills; below it was a crimson disc, and above a clear blue expanse. Radiating from this arc were bars of distinct shades, which shone for a few minutes, some only seconds, and melted into a sheet of yellow and rose. The light was continuous from the sky far along the horizon.

Turning from the rainbow-tinted water to the north-east, great exclamations came from the children, echoed by Roy, at the marvellous contrast, for though a rose-flush still tinged that eastern horizon, the broad flood flashed like burnished steel, as the rays of a full moon fell directly upon it. After the glare of the sunset, the change was as sudden as from noon to midnight. Rex and Dot became tongue-tied, as they watched the wonderful miracle of beauty. Gradually their eyes became accustomed to the chastened silvery light, as it touched the dark green foliage, and brought into clear relief palms, sugar-cane, and plantain; so that when they once more turned towards the west, it was there where the seeming darkness rested. Only for a moment though, and then they discerned a beautiful olive-green horizon, which gradually faded in the clear silver moonlight.

"Well; I have never seen anything more magnificent!"

said Roy, at last, drawing a deep breath. "It is worth the voyage to the West Indies to see such a glorious sight as that."

"Not such a voyage as ours, Mr. Royston," said Dot, creeping up, and putting her little hand in his. "Not with such a dreadful end."

"No, Dot, I did not mean our voyage."

"I have seen many a sunset in different foreign parts," said Fag; "but I have never seen a grander one than that. Yet it's wonderful how folks get accustomed to them. I've heard my mates say, 'Give them the clouds, aye, and the fog too, of old England.'"

"Yes," said Roy, "I understand. The fog, the blacks, and the smuts are dear to the Englishman when away."

"Yes, sir. They talk of the Swiss pining for their home more than any other nation; but I don't believe it, and never have. I've mixed a lot with people of all nations, and they appear to me, most of them, to fret after their own land. They say that the French make the West Indies their home far more than the English, who look upon it merely as a place of business, from which they hasten at the earliest opportunity."

"It is quite true, for the English, of all others, are a home-loving race, and 'the old country' is more, I fancy, to them, than 'fatherland' to the Germans, or *notre pays* to the French. Do you remember ever hearing that old poem called, 'The Home Fever: a reminiscence of the West Indies?'"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Please say it to us," cried poetical Dot.

"I only remember the first verse. A Scotch captain I made three voyages with, was always singing it. He was a brave true-hearted man; but his home was in the Highlands, and his heart never came out of it. He was always spinning long yarns about Scotland to the officers. Many a spot in these

islands reminded him of home, and then he would break out with.

“ ‘We sat alone in a trellised bower,
And gazed o’er the darkening deep ;
And the holy calm of that twilight hour
Came over our hearts like sleep.
And we dreamed of the banks and the bonny brass,
That have gladdened our heart in childhood’s days.’ ”

Can’t remember the next verse, sir.”

“This is the last,” said Roy :

“ ‘Oh ; talk of spring to the trampled flower,
Of light to the fallen star
Of glory to those, who, in danger’s hour,
Lie cold in the field of war.
But ye mock the exile’s heart when ye tell
Ought, save the home, where it pines to dwell.’ ”

“Oh ; how lovely !” cried Dot, folding her hands. “That is the most beautiful verse.”

No wonder she thought so, for Roy had recited it with great pathos ; and when Fag had gone to the different points to reconnoitre, she asked for some more.

“Do you ever make up any, Mr. Royston ?”

“Not often.”

“Oh, tell me some you have written.”

“I do not think I have ever written any down ; but I thought of four lines when I was clinging to that boat.”

“Do tell us, please.”

“It was upon what you said about Jesus walking on the sea.

“ ‘When Peter sank beneath the wave
And thought to find a watery grave,
Christ’s arm did even then sustain—
He did but sink to rise again.’ ”

"That is lovely!" cried Dot. "You must have felt so like Peter."

Fag and Roy pulled all the way back with but little assistance from the sail. Young Royston thought the sailor seemed very quiet, and when they had landed, or what the "little couple" called "home again," he said,

"Fag; you go off to your hammock. You are very tired, I can see."

The sailor waited until the children had gone into the hen-coop, and then said,

"It's not that I'm tired—I'm worried. You see, sir," continued he, in answer to a look of surprise, "we are in a back island, where no steamers ply. That one from Jamaica, that we ran foul of, had no more business in this water than we had. If she had, her consort would have been after her, for they both run on the same road."

"You don't think one might come by chance, then?"

"Not unless they run in through a fog, and then we can't see 'em. Might as well sit on the banks of the Thames below Richmond and expect P. & O. to pass."

"A bad look-out for us; but if Captain Paton and the others who escaped, reached land, would they not say—could they not tell in what direction they were lost?"

"Hardly—I doubt it," said Fag, slowly. "If he had known, he would never have got fixed as he did, and they went off in the fog, and got far away, long before it cleared."

"You said that far away in the eastern horizon, on the other side of the island, we might see a sail."

"We might; but it would be almost a miracle if we did. We have not any rockets, and I doubt their perceiving a flag or a bonfire all those miles away."

"What is best to be done? We can't stay here all our lives."

"There's only one way—rowing over to the parent island yonder. Perhaps two days would do it."

"Is that why you have made me keep my hand in?"

"Yes, sir. You see, I dare not venture so far in the little boat, and the large one I could not possibly manage by myself. If it has to be done, you and I will have to do it. Of course, had we been alone, I should have proposed it at once; but I was thinking of the youngsters. They will have to be left behind."

"Left behind!" cried Roy, aghast.

"Yes, sir. We could not take the little gi— you see. I had thought of building up a cabin for them; but that would make the boat too heavy. I had been in hopes I might manage with the boy, and you could stay and take care of her; but he has not been used to it, and his strength would not hold out in case of rough winds and storm. We must prepare for contingencies. You can say on land, 'I'll go, and come back in three or four days;' but you can't do that at sea in a boat."

Roy did not answer for a moment.

"I cannot take in the idea yet, Fag," said he, presently. "To leave these poor children alone on an unknown island, without any refuge in case of danger, appears at present impossible. No, I cannot do it. Those little lives, through the providence of God, are bound up in mine. I dare not cast it off."

"I'm thinking more of the youngsters than about ourselves, sir, that I can tell ye. I can't sleep o' nights for thinking what's to be done. There's been time enough now for a cablegram to reach England with the news of the loss of the *Victoria*; and there's a vast deal of fretting going on in parents' hearts, and I wanted to shorten it if I could."

"Yes, Fag, yes. I know your proposition is for others' sakes; but leave it a few weeks longer. Better that they should bear the suspense in England, than that their children should run the risk of extreme danger. I know that their

parents would agree with me, and would far rather suffer than they."

So the sailor said no more then, and next day they moved to their new quarters in the large boat with all their belongings, and the smaller one tied on. The only thing left behind was the little grave, upon which was written on a slip of paper :

"In memory of Snap, who died of a broken heart, watching for his drowned master, on the wreck of the *Victoria*."

Two or three days were spent getting settled. The hen-coop was fixed on higher ground—or rather the "dovecot" and drawing-room—while lower down, sheltered, yet commanding a lovely view, was the "dining-room."

The first effort was to fix up the signal of distress—sooner said than done. The flag was ready, but where could it be placed ?

"I know," cried Rex. "There's a cocoa-nut tree awfully high, like the mizen-mast, with leaves to it. The very top has been struck by lightning. I should say it is quite bare, and towers up by itself, as if it were saying, 'Hang something on me, and let me be of use again.' So let us hoist the flag on that; it would be grand. We should fancy ourselves in Windsor Castle."

"Then you must get the monkey to climb and do it, for we can't."

"I think the monkey can be taught to do it," said Rex, walking off to the "dovecot" after his wife, to whom he confided an important secret, permitting Tippoo, as they called the monkey, to listen. The consequence was, a treasured ball of thick, strong twine, that Fag had given him, was unwound, and the tip tied round the foot of the monkey; and then he was sent a little way up a tree, and then higher and higher.

until he reached the top, to his evident satisfaction, and quite enjoyed the clapping of his young master and mistress beneath. Then they examined the tall cocoa-nut tree, and found that next to it was an immense tree, with thick branches all the way up, and not at all difficult to mount. The first and the last steps were the worst.

"I know," said Dot, and rushing away, she soon returned with a rough kind of ladder, that Fag had amused himself by constructing.

It just reached the desired branches. So far so good. They would set to work next morning at daylight, when Roy and Fag would be fast asleep, tired out no doubt with their present work, which was raising an immense quantity of brushwood to form a bonfire at night when clear. It was to be of great height, so as to be seen miles at sea. They had all been working at it, as it had to be far enough from the sea so as not to be washed away, and far enough from the trees not to catch fire. A high bank of sand was at last decided upon.

"Fortune favours the brave!" exclaimed Rex, when they found themselves the only wide-awake possessors of the early morning, besides the birds.

They had been so afraid of over-sleeping, that they had ended by scarcely having any. It appeared quite dark to them, when a few notes of birds began to break the silence of night, perhaps indicating that signs of dawn were perceptible in the eastern horizon.

Rex called out to Dot that they might safely get up. And so they did, and by the time it was broad daylight, the flag and thick cord, with the ladder, were all at the base of the tree. Up they went into the great branches, which were like steps to Rex with his agility, and to Dot in her *à devant* practices. The flag was dragged up after them until close to the cocoa-nut tree, then the monkey was sent up to the top with the cord, which was rapidly loosened as he ascended.

His delight was extreme as he reached the top, while he commenced chattering and grinning to such an extent, that Rex declared he was saying "Excelsior!" Then they beguiled him down again with biscuit, doing just what they hoped he would do—catching the string in one of the projecting stumps, thus forming a double line, to one of which they fastened the flag, rolled up. Then Rex clung to the farthest branch of the huge tree, reminding him of a similar experience that memorable day at the "Haunted House;" but this being far more venturesome and dangerous, he, of course, enjoyed it accordingly, especially the swing to that of the cocoa-nut tree. From that point the ascent resembled that of the mizen-mast; but like his apt pupil, the monkey, he gained the summit, and catching hold of the cord, gradually hauled up the flag, Dot retaining the other end. He had forgotten to examine the rings. What if they had been wrenched off! It would have been next to impossible to accomplish his grand design, and his heart was all in a flutter of thanksgiving when he found that they were all intact, and that there were no end of notches to which he was able to fasten them.

It happened that Roy and Fag had arranged overnight to row out in the early morning and see if their future bonfire, when fixed, would be in the right position. Yes, Fag declared, the eminence was just made for it, and they could proceed with their work. It was only when they turned to come home that they simultaneously gave a great exclamation, for there, waving above the highest tree on the island, was the Union Jack, its bright colours contrasting with the green of the foliage.

"Is the place haunted?" cried Fag; while Roy looked up with parted lips, and "Is it possible he could have done it?" fell from them. "Yes, it must be that boy of yours. It is only the 'admiral' who could have done it."

Then, as they neared, the wind seemed to veer round in a peculiar manner, for the flag twisted, and there stood Rex, waving his cap.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! I've won the 'Victoria Cross.' 'Excelsior.' I'm afloat."

Roy grew white, and Fag called out in too expressive a manner to repeat—he was, and looked alarmed.

"Rob, come down."

Dot was trying to get a view of her lord and master, and called out,

"Don't call him down. I want to see him. Please row me out."

"No, it is too dangerous. Come down, 'admiral,'" cried Fag.

"I don't feel dangerous at all," cried the hero. "I have my feet firm on two stumpy bits of wood. I'll stand by the flag of England. Hurrah! Please take Dot out to see her husband stand to his colours. The 'General' says, 'A soldier must never leave his flag though in a post of danger!' I can't very well carry out command; but I have climbed the post of danger instead."

There was no resisting Rex. In a few minutes Dot was taken into the boat and rowed out till she had a lovely view of "her soldier husband," as she termed him; and then she stood up in the boat and clapped her hands, and Rex again waved his cap, and she waved hers in delight at the success of their scheme, and then Rex was told to wait until the two men could be under the tree, in case of accident; but, to their surprise, as the boat shoved up the sand, he ran down to meet them, helped Dot to alight, and was caught in Roy's arms, with a look and a hug that Rex knew meant all kinds of things.

"Give me your hand, 'admiral,'" said Fag, and his voice was quite husky. "If any vessel sees that flag it will be all through you. You will have saved all our lives. I hope

I am shaking hands with a future general or admiral. I firmly believe I am; but I tell ye, if you get up to such foolhardy pranks, you will never live to be either."

"Fag says you will never live to die in your bed," remarked Roy.

"Admirals and generals seldom do," said Rex, complacently, looking towards the sea, as if it were a battle-field, and he were expecting a complimentary bullet.

"I wish I had known you meant to go up there Rob," said Roy.

"The monkey did it," replied Rex. "Fag said he would, and he did."

Then the children described their ingenious method of hoisting the flag, kissing and petting the monkey, to his intense satisfaction.

"Oh, Rob, lad, if you had turned giddy!" shuddered Roy. "What did you feel like when really at the top?"

"Like Lord Clive, when he astonished the people of Market Drayton by climbing to the high steeple, and seating himself on a stone spout near the top," said Rex.

"Ah, Rob, I don't think you would follow him in his pranks on *terra firma*," remarked Roy. "Clive was a wild, passionate, idie boy. He formed all the most mischievous lads of the town into a predatory band, levying a species of blackmail on the shopkeepers, in consideration of preserving their windows from being broken."

"Robin would never be a ringleader in doing wicked things," broke in Dot. "He is always doing kind things for people, and saving their lives."

"Yes, little woman, that is what I mean, and I hope that will ever be his aim, lawfully."

"What do you mean by 'lawfully'?"

"Never mind now, Dot, perhaps Rob knows. I am sure he does, and sometime he will tell you."

Days passed. They saw vessels far off on the horizon, but

not any of them appeared to notice the flag. Once a steamer, it was thought, had perceived the signal and altered its course; but an hour afterwards she was only a speck on the water.

They went to spend the afternoon on the other side of the island at their old quarters, though what they expected to see, beyond the grave of Snap, was only known to themselves. Rex and Dot were, of course, in advance, and when they came within earshot, they heard his voice telling them to make haste, as there was a treasure thrown up from the wreck, and he was busy trying to open it with a huge iron nail.

"What is it like?" asked Fag.

"A round tin, with jolly red rims, and a band of blue."

Roy was startled to see the sailor rush forward with a horrified exclamation, push the boy nearly over, and grasping the tin, cried,

"Thank God, we were not too late, another minute, and we might all have been blown into eternity. It is gunpowder in that tin."

Rex turned very white. Dot clasped her hands, and fixed her large eyes on him with parted lips, and terror marking every feature.

Roy put his hand up to his eyes, as if to shut out an awful picture. His face could not be seen. He was standing immovable facing the sea; but not a word was uttered for many minutes.

Fag sat down on the bank, as he confessed afterwards, powerless in every limb, even more terror stricken than on the doomed vessel the night of the shipwreck.

A strange stunned feeling took possession of the little party, and they walked quietly back, each occupied with their own thoughts, even the children scarcely exchanging a word. It was only at night, before they parted, that Rex showed in his

prayer the depth of his feelings, and as they kissed each other and said "good-night," he asked,

"Wife, what verse came to you to-day, when Fag told me that—that—that was gunpowder? I thought, 'Thou savest my life from destruction.'"

"I could not think at all," said Dot, "not at first; but afterwards it came to me, 'The angel of His presence saved them,' and He did, Hubby, dear." And there was a sob in the little voice.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALONE!

FRANK ROYSTON stood looking towards the far distant horizon, as he had done day after day since the flag had been hoisted. Was it only in the night that vessels passed? Fag had again been trying to persuade him to make with him a rapid journey to the nearest inhabited island; but Roy only shook his head, and asked him, what if he had listened before, and they had gone off ere the discovery of the gunpowder? They would have returned to find their island blown up and the children—where? It was too awful to contemplate.

The tins of food were being rapidly consumed; the biscuits decreasing daily. Yet he could not leave his charges, who had wound round his heart, nearer and dearer.

While he thought and gazed and hoped, Dot came to him in great distress, saying that Rex was reading his "General" to her, when he suddenly threw down the book and himself on the grass and, burying his face on it, was crying bitterly; and as he never did that unless it was something very dreadful, would he come with her and make him say what it was. She was sure he was not hurt, for that never made him cry.

"Did he not speak, Dot, when he left off reading?"

"He kept stopping before he left off, and at last said. 'Oh, wife! Wife! Please come and see what he means.'

Roy found Rex as d bed, and could not get him to speak for some time. last he raised his head from the book.

"Look what the 'General' has said to me! Why did he not say it before? Oh, how I wish I had read it first. I would have gone to father, and now it is too late—too late. Perhaps he is dead, and I have killed him; or I shall die here, and he—and—he will never—know—I am sorry," and again his head went down on his folded arms, sobbing as if his heart would break.

Roy read where Rex had pointed. Evidently his "General" was speaking or writing to a young boy:—"Never think of such a thing, my dear lad. Make no such plan without consulting your father, he is a good and wise man. Too many boys only look upon their father as a sort of automatic machine that, under certain directions, can give an unlimited supply of what they desire—that their only business is to keep the machinery soft and easy to move, dreading to put it out of order, in case the fountain may cease to flow. Never let that be so with you. Make that dear father of yours your friend. Yes, I mean it—your *friend*. Consult him in every difficulty; go to him in all your troubles. If you have done wrong, confess it to God, and then tell your father about it, and you will see your Heavenly Father's answer in his. Be quite sure that through your boyhood and manhood that will be the quickest and safest and surest way to get on. Many a young man has got into great difficulties through not taking his small ones to his father in his boyhood. The best women and the best men are those who have made real friends of their mothers and fathers. You are going into the army, my boy. Let this be your resolve—let it be one of your 'articles of war.' You will need it at school, at Sandhurst, and then, when you are an ensign, and require it more than ever, it will come naturally to you. And when you become captain, and have to lead others, they will follow you as one who knows the

way; and you will win a reward so glorious, that the sheen on the 'Victoria Cross'—your great prize—pales before it."

Roy needed no word from Rex. He saw all that had dawned upon him. So he just raised him up, and with his arm thrown round his shoulders, the boy sobbed out, in broken sentences, the great mistake of his young life, that had come to him, he said, like a 'flash of lightning,' through his "General." Oh, if he could only write to his father; if only he could use lightning power, and, through the electric wire, flash that one word, "Forgive."

They had a long talk over it that quiet Sunday afternoon, for, even on a desert island, the sweet calm of the "rest-day" makes itself felt, though there be no man to take it from his fellow.

Fag had dragged in a floating tin, which he hoped contained edibles of some kind; but there were only a few biscuits in it. Rex, however, pounced upon strips of cardboard, which the box contained, and, cutting up a hundred rounds, strung them, each one for a day in the week, with the largest for Sunday, for fear they might forget; and each morning, as he woke, he took the previous day off the cord. At eleven o'clock and at seven they used to meet, and Roy would conduct a short service. If any one could have whispered to him at the beginning of the summer how he would be engaged at its close? and all through the boy at his side!

"Do you think they know of the loss of the *Victoria*?" asked Rex.

"Yes, old man, some days ago, depending whether the survivors were picked up or landed."

"And they think I am drowned—dead," said he, under his breath, "and Dot—all through me."

Roy could only draw him closer.

"My 'General' says that 'it is a terrible thing when death comes between a father and son, without forgiveness asked or granted.'"

"There will be time for both, Rob, we may hope, in this case."

"If we could only get away," said Rex, for the first time.

Neither of the children had expressed any wish to leave the island. When Rex risked his life to hoist the flag, it was for the sake of others and his own love of adventure; but now he, and of course Dot, were eager to go, willing to encounter any danger, so that they might reach an island, whence a steamer would take them to England.

"There is only one way, Rob," said Roy, after deep thought—"a way Fag has often wished me to consider."

"What's that?" cried the couple together.

"Rowing out to the first large inhabited island."

"Jolly! Why did you not want to go?"

"Because it involves leaving you two dear children behind, and I could not consider that for one moment."

"Could we not all go?"

"No, that would be impossible. We might do it in three days, there and back; but that far-off horizon is a very deceitful thing. We might be a week. Fag gave you lessons in rowing in case you might go with him, and I could stay and take care of Dot; but you would not have the strength if the wind got up."

Rex knew he should not, his arms—in fact, his whole body had ached awfully after each rowing expedition.

"You go, Roy, if you like, and I will stay and take care of Dot; and——"

"And open tins of gunpowder," added Roy, with a smile, ending with a shudder.

"No; I will not open anything but what Fag says I may."

"You might be frightened at something," suggested Roy, all kinds of alarming incidents passing through his mind, though he would not suggest them for the world.

"Robin is never frightened at nothing," said Dot, looking at him proudly. "There are not even bears here."

"But, Roy, I do wish you could stay with us. Can't Fag go alone?" cried both together, giving Roy's arms a great grip.

"No; he could not, for it is only the large boat that could stand against storm and wind."

"Then you *must* go, Roy, and we must stay here," said Rex decidedly, and the last penetrating rays of the setting sun cast a crimson glow upon the three faces—uncertainty and anxiety depicted on Roy's; Rex with fixed lips and eyes, and set shoulders, bent on facing the inevitable; and Dot's shining with her trustful, resting love.

Hours after the moon shone upon Frank Royston alone, pacing up and down, looking across the silver-lighted waters, and then resting on the "dovecot." Fag joined him, and presently the great bonfire sent up its signal, the lurid glare extending far over the sea; and then they had a long talk, and after they separated, Roy thought and thought, and the moonbeams and the red firelight cast strange reflections on his anxious, grave face; and when at last he rolled into his hammock, it was not to sleep, for he had decided that, if no help came ere another week had closed, he and Fag should start for the nearest inhabited civilized island.

With what searching, longing eyes he scanned the horizon every day, rising in the night to see that the beacon-fire was burning bright, making it higher and higher each night.

Rex said little about the coming parting; but Roy knew, by the sudden grips and hugs, that he was thinking about it, and that he was trying to cheat himself into merriment. Had he seen him unstrung the days of that last week, he would have felt inclined to give up his trip. Not even Dot saw him. They were to go the following Monday—Thursday—Friday—Saturday. How very slowly he took that off—that last working day—for Fag and Roy were doing their utmost for the comfort and protection of the children, and Rex and Dot thinking of everything they could for the

comfort of the voyagers. A great deal of smuggling went on. There was a special tin of meat Fag had preserved for extremities—the very last, and it was to be left for the “little couple,” who, on their side, were equally determined that it should be for the grown men, who required all their strength to row; and, although they had one with them, might not find it enough. So after Fag had placed it in the sheltered nook that contained the stores, which Dot called the “pantry,” it was conveyed into the large boat, and hidden under the tarpaulin, which Roy, finding, returned and put it in a large empty tin.

There was a question about the gun. Should it be left for Rex in case of some terrible need, or to kill the wild fowl, as Fag and Roy did? No; they came to the conclusion it was better not. They needed it at sea, and it was safer to take it away.

Rex had been swung up in a hammock close to Roy of late—he thought it much more manly than being covered up in the “dovecot;” but now he had it removed to the hen-coop, which was quite capable of containing it.

Fag had made Dot a comfortable little bedstead out of some floating wood, and as she recovered no end of wools, she was quite cosy.

The “Sunday card” was taken off the cord with a full heart. Fag said it would be best to start at sunset, so that they might have daylight to discover what kind of island they were approaching. They all felt very sad, though they did their best not to show it for the sake of each other, when Roy read the service.

“Well,” said Fag, at its conclusion, “I hope this day week we shall be together again, right as a trivet.”

Rex wrote down on Monday various directions to put in action should the occasion or circumstance occur.

Diver could not quite understand the stir in the little group. He was evidently wondering whether he was to go

in the boat, that was moored close at hand, but showed not any desire to embark. Quite the contrary, he stuck close to Rex and Dot, as if he intended to take good care of them.

At sunset, when the humming-birds and the rest of the feathered inhabitants were betaking themselves off to their resting-places, Fag and Roy stepped into the boat; but just as Fag was saying, "Now, are you ready?" he sprang out again, clasped the two children to his heart, and dashed back again. They ran down to the extreme end of the shore, waving and calling out that they should look out for their return, and watch for the first speck of their boat in the distance on Thursday.

Roy felt hoarse and choky, and Fag gave some heavy pulls with his oar, muttering,

"I'd have given a purse full of money rather than have left those precious youngsters to take care of themselves; but there was no help for it. Bless 'em; I can't look at them."

Yes, they were leaving a sweet picture behind them. They had gone to a high bank, which they called the flag-tower. The Union Jack was gracefully waving its adieu, and Dot and Rex doing the same with branches of bamboo; and Diver by their side, barking "farewell," which echoed across the waters, brilliant with the last rays of the sun, which gilded the summit of the flag-pole and the loftiest trees.

The little couple watched and watched and strained their eyes until they only saw two specks on the sea, and one moving above. It was Roy, waving for the last time. The air seemed full of "good-byes." Strange, bright birds, with golden wings—a few macaws and parrots, were wending their evening flight over the waters, uttering their harsh "good-nights," which were answered by the frogs in a melancholy croak, ever lamenting the departed Indian race, "Ca—rib, Ca—rib."

The heavens became sprinkled with the forget-me-nots of

the angels, and where, only a few minutes before, in the direction of the boat, there had been a bank of rainbow-coloured clouds, there was now only a pale, silvery vapour, that gradually diffused itself over land and sea. The larger birds, with a rush of wings, and with weird minor cries, flew by and disappeared in the gloom.

Rex put his arm round Dot,

“ And far away, in the twilight sky,
They heard them singing a lessening cry ;
Farther and farther, till out of sight,
And they stood alone in the silent night.”

The only real sleeper seemed the monkey that first night. The little couple sat with Diver between them, till Dot imagined she saw all sorts of queer things in the trees, so they retired to the hen-coop, and talked on and said verses.

“ Don't say that one about the earth, Rob, where it comes something like this :

“ ‘ Thou hast 'stablished it fast
By a changeless decree,
And round it hath cast,
Like a mantle, the sea.’ ”

It makes me feel all cold and shivering. It is not the mantle that I should like to wear, that drowns people, and separates them from those they love.”

“ We are not separated, wifie, darling,” said Rex, drawing a soft woolly round the tired little form, and making her rest her head on his shoulder.

“ Oh, Diver, please don't prick up your ears like that. It makes me think there are savages coming to eat us up.”

“ They have never come while Roy and Fag were here, so why should they come now ? ” said Rex ; “ and I don't believe

that God will let them. You know that 'The Angels of the Lord encamp around,' so don't be watching Diver's ears. The 'General' said to me, only yesterday, 'How strange it is that we feel safer with helpless man that we can see, rather than with the All Powerful One, whom we cannot see.'"

"Yes," said Dot, "quite true; but I wish the 'General' had been here instead of his book."

Rex gave a little laugh all to himself. Dot was too sleepy to understand his "General," that was clear. They were all seated on her little bed, Diver now lying full length on it. Presently the monkey crept under his head, and the two children had turned his back into a pillow, and were fast asleep at last, with one arm round their four-legged protector. Even his low growls did not awaken them, for in the early morning he was always much disturbed. The extraordinary noises made, not only by the roaring "calf-bird," and that of the "tolling bell," but various parrot-screeches and other peculiarities, to which he had never been accustomed, made him bark at first every time; but now he was gradually reducing them to growls.

It was very late when they at last awoke, certainly refreshed and inclined to look a little more brightly at things in general. But now they missed Fag's knocking. He was always making something. What a stillness it was without the talk of the two men, who had always a plan in prospect for the day. Now Rex was afraid of forming any, for fear it would be considered too venturesome by Roy. Rex would have dared almost anything by himself; but he was bound to take care of Dot, so would not run any risks for the world. They made their coffee and ate biscuit and bananas, too hungry to wait and catch sardines, or any other fish. But for their dinner they carried out the saying, "First catch your hare, and then cook it," for they were fishing the greater part of the morning; and then, as the shadows deepened in the late afternoon, they gathered fuel for the bonfire, which the men had cut down,

but which they were directed to move very carefully, on account of any snakes lurking therein.

Rex longed to row out to the wreck to see if there were anything floating. It had been the daily amusement for so long, that they quite looked forward to it, but Fag said he must not attempt it, except in extreme need, in case of an accident. They might, if they liked, paddle about close in shore; but even that might be dangerous.

As nothing had happened the first night, they had greater trust for the second; and Rex ventured back to his hammock, and they had a calm and quiet time.

The following morning, when he went out to his bath, he called out to Dot to come at once. There was a large speck out at sea, and that it might turn into a boat. It might be Roy and Fag coming back. How glad they should be. After breakfast they found out it was indeed a boat. They could not settle to anything—they could only watch it.

"There is only one man in it," suddenly said Rex, "and that is not Roy or Fag."

"Oh, it's not a savage, is it?" cried Dot, with a frightened look.

"No, no; I hope not," said Rex, with a queer feeling, remembering that they always went about in canoes, and this was certainly very like one.

As it neared, they saw to their dismay that the occupant was a black man, and that he was making direct for the island.

"Let us run away!" cried Dot. "Let us go and hide!"

"No; that would be no good," said Rex. "Remember, this is an island, and we cannot get away. We must face him."

Diver thought so too, for he rushed at full speed down to the shore, and commenced barking with all his might. Wherever the man tried to put in, there he was met by the dog, bent on preventing his landing. He looked so fierce.

that Rex feared he would jump into the boat and attack him, which might make it worse for them. So he called him off, and at last ran down to make him obey; but nothing would induce him to leave. He only looked at them between his barks, which, in his speech, meant,

"I know much better than you who shall land here, and I intend to prevent anyone doing so in the absence of the master. I shall protect you, whether you like it or not."

"He is a nigger," said Dot, "like those Jumper used to have at Christmas time; but I do not think they were real."

"No; they were only pretend niggers. This is a real one. He has a nice face, though it is black."

"He does not look as if he wanted to eat us, does he?" said Dot. "He has clothes on. He can't be a cannibal."

Dot's ideas were not so advanced on some points as on others. She thought all the natives of every island were more or less savages, whose only garments consisted of paint, beads, and feathers.

He was trying to make friends with Diver, whose teeth were set to the words, "Not if I know it." So Rex and Dot ran down to the shore.

The negro was attired in a graceful costume of white linen, with a sort of turban, of a light, snowy material, all of which set off his well-proportioned figure and handsome face. He looked up from the dog and gazed speechless at the sight of the two children. Then he folded his arms half over his head, bowing low to them. His next act was to take up a branch of bamboo he had in the canoe, and throw it into the water, and another piece in front of the children. Finally he took up an arrow and broke it over his head.

Rex feared the bow was to follow, when he first raised it, and was relieved to see it broken. But Dot thought the performance was a sort of conjuring, and wondered what he would do next. They did not know that they were all signs

of peace, and that he wanted to show them that his visit was friendship. His looks quieted their fears, and they succeeded in calling Diver to their side.

"Me frenni," said the man. "Me no hurt little missy—me no hurt little master. Me love white man. Yes, me once hate him, now Jum bolove him. Mission mister and mission missy come and tell about Good Spirit—tell about Jesus. Me love Him. Me had black heart—now me have white heart; and me love white man. Mission mister heard great ship go down. Great lot white men go down too. Me saw boat. Me save white men. Mission mister say, 'Jumbo, go save more.' Me go here, there—no white men. Last night me saw great fire burn, burn, burn all night. Morning come, me saw flag—white man flag. Me come and see little white children alone. Me now save them. Me want to save gold-hair missy. Come wid Jumbo to mission mister and mission missy."

Rex and Dot only half comprehended what the negro intended to convey; but they did understand that he desired to take them away, and they shook their heads, and said,

"No, thank you—no."

Then Jumbo looked sorrowful, pointed up to the sky and down to the sea, and said, clasping his hands,

"Rain coming—rain, wind, storm."

So Dot, to show she understood that, clasped her hands too, and said,

"Never mind rain. We have a little house. Would you like something to eat?" added she, in the same way that she would try to make friends with a strange dog

"Yes," added Rex, "would you like some water too?"

"Tanke, no—no. Little massa very good—little missy kind, very. Me has food. Me brought food for white man. Mission mister give flour, give rice—look!" And the negro fished up from his canoe a small sack of rice, and another of flour.

"Oh, how nice!" cried Dot. "We have nearly eaten up all our things. Come and see if there is anything you would like."

Jumbo again threw down a branch and folded his arms with a low bow, to signify that his landing only meant friendship, and sprang out of the boat—an act entirely disapproved by Diver, who plainly manifested his disapprobation to sudden friendship with a black man, and that he would be no party to it, by running at his heels and keeping up a continual growl.

"Where house?" asked he. "This no house for rain," said he, as he was shown the hencoop.

"It's lovely!" replied Dot. "It has rained and we never got wet."

"Great rain coming," and Jumbo pointed to the sky, and shook his head. "Angel missy get wet. Me go see for other house."

Rex saw him eyeing some tins, very bright but empty, and asked him if he would like them, at which he seemed very pleased; and still more when Dot brought him a small scarlet shawl.

Taking off his turban, he twisted it in with the white India-muslin, and then replaced it on his head, delighted, then saying, "Me come again," he vanished, leaving Rex and Dot very mystified, and who talked over all he had said, trying to unravel it between them.

A long time passed before Jumbo again made his appearance, which was announced by Diver barking as if a whole regiment of savages were approaching, and made Rex think, though he would not for the world frighten Dot with the idea, that perhaps, after all, he was only pretending to be friendly, and that a band of blacks were landing on the other side and were on their way to destroy them.

Diver suddenly flew towards the sea.

"You great stupid," cried Rex, "he can't come that way

without his boat," but before the words were out of his mouth, to his great amazement, Jumbo came round a rock and beckoned to them.

"Me found safe place for storm for little massa and missy. Come—see."

On the sand-bank beyond the bonfire was a high rock, to which they had never paid any particular heed. To this rock Jumbo led the way, and to their surprise, saw that it was accessible from the off-side through pieces of rock that the sea had washed away, and so forming steps. Dot tried to pull Rex back.

"Don't go on, Rob, it may be a trap. Perhaps there are wild beasts up there; or he is going to shut us in and leave us to starve and die."

"Then you stay there," said Rex, "and I will go up and look in."

"No, no," said Dot, "we will go and die together. Man is not to 'sunder' us."

"I have no intention of dying up there," returned Rex. "Come along."

Seeing them hesitate, and the frightened look on Dot's face, Jumbo paused.

"Come up—no fear. Me only wish take care of golden-hair missy in rain and wind. Me tell true. Me Christian, me tell no lie. Come—come."

The man looked so hurt at being doubted, that Rex took hold of Dot and mounted the steep ascent. They came to a low aperture. The negro had to bend down very low to get in. Rex dragged in Dot after him, fearing she would turn and bolt, and great was their surprise to find themselves in a small round cave, into which the sun was shining brilliantly on the crystal walls, through an aperture like a window, from which was a grand view of the vast ocean, and to the right their beautiful emerald island, where the flag was waving in triumph.

To think Fag and Roy had never seen this wonderful grotto!

Jumbo's face cleared at their delight.

"Nothing frighten missy here. No sea—no snake."

"Can't the water come in at the window?" they enquired.

"No; never now. Come see."

Taking them out again, he showed them the highest point the tide ever rose far down. And then he made them understand that the sky showed signs of an approaching storm, and that if it came, the hen-coop, though covered with tarpaulin, was too fragile to contend with the fury of the elements, that directly all the black clouds came they were to hasten to this cave, where they would be quite safe. That they had better make it their store-house at once, so that they could fly hither, in case of need, at a moment's notice. In fact, all their property had better be at once transferred, as it would be far safer to sleep up there than in so insecure a dwelling as the "dovecot," in case of a storm coming on in the night. It took a very much longer time to explain all this than to write it, and they tried to make him understand that they had a sailor with them and a gentleman, who had gone to find an island that was inhabited.

"What dem tings floating?" asked he, suddenly. It was explained that it was about there that the doomed *Victoria* met her fate, and Rex told him they used to go every day and see what they could find; but, although he could row a little, he had been forbidden to do so in the absence of the sailor.

"Little massa good boy. Me take him and little missy to wreck now."

The children shook their heads.

What if he got them in his canoe, and took them both away for ever?

"Little missy think black man only tell lies," said Jumbo, and Dot grew very red at the thought of how he knew their suspicions.

Rex said quickly,

"I think you speak truth. We will go, but can you row?"

"Yes; me serve white man—me row much."

As it became cooler, they all went to the wreck—Diver too, who had never left their side a minute. The boat was tied on to the canoe, and on their way many things were floating—a pretty wicker chair, very little broken, which Rex said he was to take to his kind master and mistress, who had sent them the flour and rice; and there were many things that the children only looked upon as rubbish, that the negro considered evidently as articles of *vertu*.

Fag had said, that as the woodwork of the *Victoria* "bust" below, the light things escaped and floated. One thing Rex captured was a tin of what he hoped would prove something to eat.

Upon their return, Jumbo conveyed all their principal belongings to the cave, and finding some great nails, fastened the tarpaulin before the entrance and the window, and which they were to finish off with string, so that it could be lifted at pleasure, and then carried in two huge stones, that they were to roll on it in the storm.

"What an awful wind Jumbo must expect to make all this preparation," said Rex, laughing, to Dot, which the negro partly understood, for, pointing to the sky, where cirrus clouds were manifesting themselves, and then to the far distant dark line of horizon, he said,

"Yes; bad wind coming. Little massa and missy better come wid Jumbo to good mission massa and mission missy. Me take care."

Then "the couple" tried to make him believe that they quite trusted him, but that they could not leave until the sailor and their friend returned, as they would think they were stolen or drowned. But he might tell the white people that they were on the island; then they thanked him very much, giving him more presents.

It had dawned upon Rex that he was servant to a missionary. "Are you?" asked he. "Is that who you mean by 'mission master'?"

Jumbo nodded and said, "Yes, yes," so while he was having some refreshment under the trees, Rex and Dot sang hymns to him, which called forth great gesticulations of delight.

"Angel missy come teach little children."

The two confabulated for some time, which ended in Rex fetching his coat, in which he found two shillings and sixpence still remaining in the lining. Then he wrote on a piece of cardboard:

"Thank you, whoever you are, for sending us flour and rice. If you are a missionary, please accept this money to buy Testaments for little children.

"R. R. RADCLIFFE."

This was given, rolled up and tied in a leaf, to Jumbo, who promised to deliver it safely, and that a ship would come to save him and "angel missy," and then, as the sun went down, the negro took his departure, and soon became, as they had first seen him, only a speck on the ocean.

His coming appeared as a dream, and it was only when they went to the cave that they realized its reality.

"It looks lovely; but I believe he only fancied there was a storm coming," said Dot. "I dare say he knows nothing about it."

"I expect he knows about the storms in his own islands," said Rex. "At any rate, there's no wind yet. It is awfully hot, there does not seem a breath of air stirring; but I've read they come on all of a sudden. Suppose 'Blackie' is wrong about the sea not rising up here. Let us get the boat, and drag and push it up here, then its rope can come through the window; and we will fasten it to a great nail that he has hammered in between the stones, and if the water comes in at

the window, the boat will rise with it, and we will get in. But I like under the trees best until the rain begins. It is so hot."

The next day dawned brilliantly. They were sorry the hen-coop had been removed; but they did not regret it for long, as the heat grew in intensity and the cool shade of their cavern retreat was delightful. It was much higher than they had first imagined. They appeared to be even with the flag almost.

In the early morning they obtained a fine pine-apple, bananas, and a cocoa-nut, which they enjoyed under the trees—at least the first two, the remainder they deposited in what they termed their "castle." Then they transported all Fag's things to the same refuge, and a high tin of water.

"Now let us shove the boat," suggested Dot.

"No; that must wait till sunset," said Rex, who had been climbing trees to knock down bananas and nuts. "I am perfectly broiling. I wish I had a white linen coat like Jumbo."

"I wish I had a cambric dress like those I saw on board," sighed Dot, waving a great leaf. "What would you like to do, Rob?"

"I should like to take off my skin and sit in my bones," answered Rex, panting. "If there were only a little breeze. Diver, do put that tongue of yours in. Here, have some water."

Diver was too hot to undergo the exertion of wagging his tail, but drank some water by way of compensation.

The monkey was the only one who seemed to enjoy the state of things, even venturing to pull Diver's tail, who showed such a fine set of teeth in return, that it retired and tore up bits of wool given him by Dot.

Just before they lighted the bonfire, they dragged and pushed up the boat; but, alas! the rope was not nearly long enough to secure it to the window. So they sat down and watched the moon, which seemed to have a strange halo about

it. There was no silvery reflection to-night on the water. No evening breeze sprang up. The "calf-bird's" bellow made them shiver in the stillness. All the other birds went early to roost with weird, unearthly noises. How they wished Roy and Fag were with them.

"I hope they will come before the storm, if there is one," said Rex.

"Let us sing the hymn we always sang on board," suggested Dot.

"Which? We sang a lot," said Rex.

"'Eternal Father, strong to save,' I mean."

"They sang it; but Rex felt it stick in his throat, he said, for they always sung it at home on Sunday night, and how all of them loved it ever since they heard of the Deep Sea Fishermen. And then he told Dot of the last Sunday evening at home, and of that special hymn that his father and mother had sung alone on purpose for him, little thinking it was his last Sunday with them.

"Dottie, I have often heard the last verse in my dreams: "

" 'Spread thy golden pinions o'er them,
Holy Spirit, from above;
Guide him, lead him, go before him,
Give him peace, and joy, and love.' "

The last line ended with a sob.

"It's lovely," said Dot. "I dare say they have often sung it since."

"Not now," said Rex. "They think I'm dead—drowned. Perhaps it has killed mother."

"It's beautiful to think how often God has listened to that hymn, Robin. He has guided you and gone before to make this lovely island for you. It might have been desert rocks, sand, or a forest of wild beasts. You might have been drowned in reality, or eaten up by a shark. You might have been dreadfully punished for running away from such a home

as yours ; but you have been given a lot of love instead. Look how Mr. Royston loves you—nearly as much as your little wife," and Dot drew down his hands from his eyes, and kissed the long wet lashes. "Let us go to the "castle,"" added she. "We can see all round there what is going on, and everything glitters. The knaves behind those trees is awful. There ; what is that noise ? Something rustling. I am sure Diver is going to eat. One never knows what dreadful creatures may be lurking and coming along from the other side the island. Come, Rob. Look at that heavy, inky cloud hides the moon again."

It was certainly better for the poor timid little nerves to be enclosed in a small place, where they could see all round, and where no unfathomable darkness could hide an enemy—man, beast, or reptile ; but a great sense of loneliness had crept over both, that instead of jumping into his hammock, which had been invitingly pitched by Jumbo, and into which it was Rex's delight to plunge, they crouched down together against the protecting wall, with Diver's head and front paws on Dot's lap, so that they could seize on his mouth and close it against barks or howls, for she felt they would make her scream, and that made Rex angry.

Sleep came at last to all four, and he was awake by her low musical laugh, to find it was broad daylight again, and the monkey had managed to swing up into the hammock in front of them, and was sitting on its edge, skinning a banana he had stolen, and which he threw down in a great fright at the sound of, "Oh, you thief !"

"I am so hungry, Dot," said Rex, presently. "Let us have some meat."

"We have only a very little bit left, and we had better keep that for dinner," said the young housekeeper.

"Well, let us have dinner now."

"Oh, Rob. Pray wait till you are more hungry. You know we gave the large new tin to Roy and Fag. I dare say

they have found it out by this time." Then a thought occurred to Dot. "You go and catch some sardines, and we will have a nice breakfast. All the cocoa has gone; but there is a little coffee left."

Directly he had left her she set to work and got the little sacks of flour and rice. Thanks to Mrs. Jumper, she knew how to make dumplings and rice puddings—the latter was out of the question. There was not any milk or any oven; but she could boil some rice and make dumplings, which she did on the embers of the bonfire, while Rex was fishing with a net.

Rex had been cautioned never to go the other side without Dot, and she was told never to be far away from Rex. She was nearly cooking herself instead of the breakfast. The heat was so stifling, it needed no fire to increase it, and she was obliged to leave her small puddings to take care of themselves, while she went to get fresh water, so as to have a proper supply in the "castle."

Rex had forgotten about flour and rice, and was very much surprised to see dumplings. They were not very light—perhaps one or two of them could have served as cricket-balls in case of need. Considering the difficulties in their preparation, it was not to be wondered at. However, appetite is the best sauce, and Rex, at least, brought plenty of that besides sardines, which he had helped to cook. They made up a mess of dumpling, sardine, banana, and biscuit, for Diver and the monkey. The former did not appear at all happy in his mind, never resting in any one place for many minutes together. The birds seemed to share his disquietude for, instead of sheltering in their nests, as the heat came on, they were flying to and fro, uttering miserable cries, in which they were joined in all keys and notes by the frogs.

Diver got up and walked towards the "castle," looking behind for them to follow. As they failed to do so, he came back and gave a pull at Dot's frock.

"I believe he thinks the monkey is stealing the things," said Dot. "I left him asleep after his food. Rob, I can hardly breathe. What is this yellow mist everywhere? It is getting dark. Oh, what is that!"

A low rumbling sound was heard.

"Is that the storm, Rob, beginning?"

"I—I—don't—think so," said Rex, as a noise like heavy artillery underneath followed, and then the ground heaved like a wave, and Dot fell forward.

"Come to the 'castle,'" cried Rex, grasping her hand. "It must be an earthquake."

The two children stood and looked at each other, a sort of petrified feeling creeping over them—sensations only experienced by those who have felt an earthquake, and for the first time. Slight shocks were continually occurring, and repeated detonations, like distant musketry shots, were heard. Then the ground rose and fell, and with it our hero and heroine, while Diver gave an awful howl. Directly they gained their feet, without one word, they took hold of hands and rushed, as fast as their trembling limbs would let them, to their "castle."

"We have left the tins behind," said Dot, turning back.

"No; come on—come on. Look—look! The sea—the sea!"

Dot gave a scream. Huge waves, like mountains, were surging in. The end of one would have caught her, had not Rex pulled her violently back, and then dragged her up the sand-bank, on and on, till they reached the great stones, which how they managed to climb they never knew, the top was reached so rapidly, and Diver wagged his tail, as if to say, that was what he wanted all the time. They had scarcely got in, and Dot had sunk exhausted on the floor, when a more severe shock shook the island to its centre. The appalling subterranean artillery rendered the children speechless. Every moment they expected to be swallowed up

—that the walls would open and crush them. Then they heard a terrible cracking and crashing down of the tall mighty trees. As the trembling ceased, the hearts of the refugees beat less wildly.

Presently a lurid glare was visible. They sprang to the window.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

THE island was on fire. A magnificent scene presented itself. The wind had blown the bonfire right on to the brushwood, which ignited, and was driving on in relentless fury, spreading devastation in its path.

"Look! look at the hen-coop!" cried Dot.

Two majestic trees, under which it had been fixed, were on fire, and presently one of them fell with a fearful crash.

"We might have been there. We should have been there," gasped the two together, and they knelt down, covering their faces, overwhelmed with what might have been, and their hearts overcharged with thankfulness at their wonderful preservation; but they could not speak. What was coming next?

The water was rushing up, it was getting higher and higher, expending its fury on the rocks. They knew not they were only tidal waves, consequent upon the earthquake. Would it reach the window and pour in, and then—then—

At last Rex loosened Dot's frightened grip on his arm. He did not want her to see how near death was. Jumbo might know a great deal about storms, but he had not, of course, anticipated an earthquake, producing unprecedented rising of water, as he had often read about—how at Lisbon, in that great convulsion of nature, the water suddenly rose over the high bridge, drowning hundreds.

He looked out. Their lovely "Garden of Eden" was being rapidly destroyed—water beneath, and fire above. He raised the tarpaulin at the entrance, and crept out. The sea had not yet covered the rocks. The boat was quite safe on the upper sand-bank, some distance beneath the window. There was some rope floating in the water. How he longed to venture down after it, as there was a lull in the wind; but it would never do, he might slip. No; he must think only of Dot.

At that moment she appeared at the aperture with Diver, ever on the watch, divided between two interests—to follow Rex into danger, or to stay and keep Dot from it.

Rex pointed to the rope.

"Fetch it, good dog, fetch it!" cried he, pointing, and the animal, quite pleased at having something to do, made his way down, swam the short distance, and brought the rope up in triumph, which the couple seized and dragged up; but there was evidently something attached to it. Supposing it was a body of one of the unfortunate victims! Dot must not see that; better cut the rope. No, that would be a pity.

"Dottie, dear, will you see if Fag's knife is in the cave?"

The instant she disappeared, he dragged and tugged with all his might. Yes, there was something coming. Here it was—a life belt!

"Dot, never mind; come along, it is all right. Here is something to keep us above the water, and a long rope for the boat."

It had been secured round a pointed jagged rock. Rex, fearing the boat would be swamped, fastened one end in the cave and the other to the boat, thus it could ascend with the water. They had not long accomplished their work, when a great thunderstorm burst over the island. The heavens seemed to open, and a huge ball of fire danced up and down, as Rex described it. He called it magnificent; but Dot was

so frightened, that he closed the tarpaulin, and tried to comfort her. A deluge of rain followed.

"I am so glad," he cried, "the rest of the island is saved—that will put out the fire."

The thunder and lightning did not last long; but it poured with rain for six hours, and the sea continued to rise.

"Dottie; let us think of the verses about the sea," said Rex at last, "you won't be so afraid then. That one we learnt last week, where God says, 'He has placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail—though they roar, yet can they not pass over it.'"

"But it has passed over it to-day," said Dot, despondently.

"Only in some places. Look, dear, there is still sand round us."

Dot stretched her neck as far as she could out of the window.

"There is water everywhere, Rob. All the trees I can see are under water. Look, Robin, at that cloud, it was ever so thick just now; but it is melting into little bits! Look—all dissolving into the blue sky!"

"I can understand that."

Though the hurricane was over, the waters were covering the rocks beneath.

"Do you think God is going to drown the world again?" asked Dot, presently.

"I know, I am *sure* He is not."

"You can't be sure of anything, Rob."

"No, not of *anything*; but I am of that, because He said so."

At that moment a lovely little humming-bird flew in at the window, rested for a moment on Dot's shoulder, and then fluttered to the floor.

"Dear little thing," said Dot. "Does not this put you in mind of the ark?"

"Not much," replied Rex, "considering there are only two human beings saved, a dog, a monkey, and a bird; yet, wife, darling, it has indeed, as you say, been a wonderful ark to us. God sent the black man to find it out for us. If he had not come when he did, we should be dead. I am sure it was quite a miracle."

"Yes," echoed Dot; "and God would not have done it if He meant to drown us in the end."

"No; look—look, wife, there is His promise!"

They were dazzled by a brilliant rainbow, which, in a broad band, struck the rocks and the island, and then formed a magnificent arch over the sea. It quieted Dot, and though the lovely sky was hidden again by clouds, and the rain fell, she stood with Rex, first at the door and then at the window talking of Fag and Roy, hoping they were safe. There was not any wood to make a fire for coffee or cook fish, even if they could catch any—not at all likely in the disturbed waters. The last piece of tinned meat had been left under the trees, so, as Rex said, he might just as well have eaten it yesterday. There was some pineapple and banana and a few biscuits, that was all. No, not all, for there was the tin of nice cold water that kept far cooler in the cave than under the trees, and they were parched with thirst. To know the fate of Fag and Roy was their present craving. Had they started before the earthquake? Were they on their way home when those great waves came? Had they engulfed the boat? Should they never see their beloved friend again? Nor the kind faithful sailor?

"What is that on the rocks?" cried Dot, suddenly. "Oh, it is the branch of a tree. Let us dry it, and then I can boil some rice. Diver will be so hungry by night."

"So shall we," said Rex. "Use as little of the water as you can. It may be days before we can get to the stream."

"I know what I will do," exclaimed Dot. "This empty tin shall go outside, and it will soon be filled with rain, so I can cook rice with that."

They dragged the branch up into the dry rock at the back, hoping that the sun might come out and render it fit for lighting; but the rain came instead, until the sun set in crimson glory. Dot declared it had set twice, but never risen for three days.

If only Roy would come back while the sea was calm.

"Let us sing," suggested she. "That may bring him." Rex would not say what he thought, and soon joined her in singing,

"Smooth the rough ocean's troubled face,
And bid the hurricane give place
To the soft breeze that wafts the barque,
Safely alike through light and dark.

"When hidden is each guiding star,
Flash out the beacon's light afar;
From mist and rock and shoal and spray,
Protect the sailor on his way.

"Good Pilot of the awful main,
Let us not plead Thy love in vain;
Jesus, draw near with kindly aid,
Say, 'It is I, be not afraid.'

"Keep by Thy mighty hand, oh, keep,
The dwellers on the homeless deep."

Neither of them spake as they finished. Stars were visible through the drifting clouds, and the accompaniment of their song continued in the lapping of the waves against the rocks beneath.

"They will be looking for our beacon," said Rex at last, "and it is out. I hope they will not make a mistake. The flag has not fallen. They can see that by day."

Rex pretended to compose himself for the night; but the instant Dot was really fast asleep, he raised the tarpaulin and went out. The sea still continued to rise. He ascended some large stones till he reached the summit. Worse came to the

worst, he could get Dot up there if the cave filled. Then a cold shiver went over him. She could not live there, even if they were not drowned. They would get sunstroke and die. He sat in a scooped out piece of rock, hour after hour, measuring the water by the window, and now and then going down to look after Dot, who continued fast asleep.

Diver had been charged to watch her, which he faithfully did, now and then going up to look after his young master in his lonely watch and the terrible thought of being left to starve and die, and he prayed that he might not be thus punished for his sin—above all, that it might not be visited on Dot. Might she be saved, even if he were left to die. He would let her have all the food that remained. There was little enough. He had heard how people, when they were drowning, saw their life pass before them—one great picture. He seemed to be seeing it all now. Oh, if he had only read *that* chapter in his "General" before he left home; yet, would he have listened to it then?

He went down into the cave. Dottie still asleep, her arm round Diver, who looked wistfully up at him, as if to say, "You come too." He thought he would for a little, that she might see him when she woke. Being very tired, he fell fast asleep. It seemed as if he had been resting a very short time, when he heard a little laugh, and the words, "Oh, you naughty thing, what have you done?" Opening his eyes, he saw Dot with a white monkey. How did the thing get in?

"You are half-asleep, Rob. Look where Tippoo has been sleeping. I suppose he wanted a soft bed."

She opened the flour-sack, and then he saw what had happened while he was on the watch.

"Don't beat him," pleaded Dot.

Rex had not the slightest intention of doing so. The sight of the flour was making him look serious. They could not make a fire to cook it. There were some matches yet, though

the large supply had been buried by Fag somewhere; but where was the wood? Should they burn up the hammock?

Dot wondered he did not laugh at the ludicrous sight presented by Tippoo in his white coat. She knew not the danger that to Rex was drawing nearer and nearer every moment.

Suddenly Diver struggled violently. The ground was wet in front of the window. Fountains of spray were coming in.

Rex started up. Was this the beginning of the end? He bounded to the window. Diver released, flew, barking furiously, at the aperture they called the door, tugging away at the tarpaulin. Then he darted back to Dot, and, alas! overturned the tin of water.

"Diver! Diver! what have you done!" they cried, trying to rescue it ere it had all gone.

Too late—too late! They looked at each other in dismay. Their only drinking water gone, and they were thirsty.

"Oh, Diver," groaned Rex, "why could you not keep the salt water from coming in, instead of overturning our last drop of fresh!"

The dog came up to them, putting his great paws on them and whining, as if asking forgiveness. Then presently he began dragging something from under a small heap of things, at last coming towards them, wagging his tail, and in his mouth a cocoa-nut, as much as to say, "I am trying to repair the loss to the best of my ability." They had quite forgotten its existence, and hailed it as a precious gift.

"We will not break it yet, Dot. Let us wait until we are quite parched with thirst," said Rex, determined that she should have it all but one little drop.

"Oh, how high the water is!" cried she. "I wish I could swim like you, and then we could get to the high trees, or even the flag-pole. The water will never come up there."

"No," said Rex, quietly.

"Do you think Diver could swim with me on his back?"

"No."

"You must not stay here only for my sake, Robin."

"Not only for yours, for mine own too. Even if I were so cruel as to leave my wife, I could not steer against that swell. I think Fag would say so, and I have learnt a great lesson not to plunge headlong into danger unless really sent."

"The boat is rising with the water, shall we get into it?" asked Dot.

"Not until the last moment. If this fills, you cannot row dear, and I might not have the strength to keep the boat from drifting out to sea."

"Then we should die, either way," gasped Dot.

"That may not be," answered Rex, slowly, afraid to give hope where all seemed hopeless. "At any rate, it will be together."

"Yes, man will never have 'sundered' us?" said Dot, trying not to sob.

"No, wife, darling. And death will not part us."

"We should have been so happy by-and-bye, Hubby, dear."

"We shall be happier very soon," said Rex; "but it will be up there. If I only could have had my father's forgiveness first."

"You know he will forgive, Robin, for Roy will tell him."

"Yes, yes; but——"

Rex could not finish. His large eyes filled with tears, that seemed to well up from the depths of his heart; and Dot threw her arms round his neck, and they clasped each other, thinking it might be the very last kiss.

A dazzling light was shining round them, though for a few moments they knew it not, and, when they raised their heads, it was to see a rainbow more gloriously beautiful than the one of the day before. Its grand triumphal arch appeared to commence from over their cave, the other end dipping into the sea, flooding with golden light a boat—yes, a boat—in which three men were seated, two rowing nearer and nearer.

Diver flew again at the door, barking and jumping.

"God sent us the rainbow last night, and we did not really believe Him; and now He has sent it again, and the boat too. It's Roy and Fag! Let us thank Him for saving us," said Rex.

"Yes; let us!" cried Dot. "It is God that has sent Roy back just in time."

As the couple rose from a thanksgiving, almost too deep for words, they heard the report of a gun. Diver flew wildly to the door, and pulled the tarpaulin with such force, that the heavy stone rolled off it, and he escaped, giving a tug to Dot, meaning, "Come, too," and as two more reports followed, they rushed out, and climbing to the high stones, commenced waving a shawl.

They were not seen at first, the occupants of the boat were watching Diver, who, barking and panting, soon reached them. They clutched at him and pulled him in; but it was not upon Roy or Fag that his joy was manifested, but upon the third gentleman, who was sitting quietly on a cushioned-seat, supported at the back. The dog nearly threw him down in the wildness of his joy.

"It is Captain Paton!" cried Rex, as they were watching the performance with delight. "Yes, it is the captain. Fag was right, he always said he was sure he was saved!"

A little time and the boat drew very near, and presently Fag and Roy jumped on to the rocks. The children flew at them, and Roy clasped them in his arms; but he was too much overcome to speak when he attempted it, his voice utterly failed, and then Fag told them how they had arrived off the island at night, and were surprised not to see the bonfire, that it made them very anxious, as they were sure they would have kept it alight if possible. The morning showed them they had not made any mistake in the island, for there was the flag still waving, but not a sign of life; and their worst fears were entertained when Captain Paton saw through

his glass that the island was under water, nearly as far as they could see. They called and called, and no doubt it was the voice of Captain Paton that had been heard by Diver and so excited him, though unheard by the children.

The shock had been very great to Roy when increasing daylight, and a nearer inspection, showed them the destruction caused by the earthquake, and the great fallen tree over the hen-coop. He seemed quite stunned with the idea that Rex and Dot must have been asleep under it when it fell; and it was not until Diver barked from another quarter, that a forlorn hope arose in his heart.

"I feel assured that were those poor children there, Diver would not have left the spot," said Captain Paton. "Remember what you told me about Snap."

That thought did bring a ray of comfort, and when the gun was fired, being immediately answered by Diver swimming to them, his hopes revived; and then he heard the shouts of the loved young voices, and saw them waving. His heart gave such a bound, that he thought it would stop with joy, and a *Te Deum*, which no lips could have sung, chimed in his heart, higher and higher, until it stopped in the silent clasp of the loved and lost.

Fag gathered the furniture of the cave, and placed it in the boat, then the children, whose delight at seeing again Captain Paton was as great as his own.

They rowed to the head of the island, where, to their intense surprise, they saw a steamer anchored. Was that going to take them all to England? No; that was only a tug, plying between the missionary islands.

Captain Paton had been landed from one of them in an unconscious state. He had partly recovered from the blow he had received, when by accident he heard the fate of his son, and that, with the loss of the ship, had brought on brain fever, through which he was tenderly nursed by the missionary and his wife, and last, but not least, Jumbo. One day there came

a tug from Porto Rico with a messenger, saying that a telegram had been received with the news that a steamer from Jamaica had seen a large flag hoisted from a mast on an island in such a latitude, supposed to be uninhabited. That at night there was a signal-fire. The vessel was unable to go to the relief of the distressed, who would no doubt be some survivors of the *Victoria*. Captain Paton thought so too, so Mr. Margrave, the missionary, sent Jumbo to reconnoitre, with what success is already known.

He went back with such accounts of the "angel missy," and brave little master, that it required no addition of their dog being "Diver," to assure Captain Paton as to their being Rex and Dot.

Immediate measures were taken for their rescue, and a little tug was ordered, and when it arrived, to the pleasure of Captain Paton, she had Roy and Fag on board. The sailor was quite hilarious at the meeting. It ended in his joining the party, and also Mr. and Mrs. Margrave. The latter had heard so much of the "little couple," that she took warmly to them, and was delighted that there was not any steamer for England until the following week. It was fortunate; both the children, especially Dot, needing care and rest after the strain on their nerves, the exposure and privation.

Deep was their interest in the children at the missionary station, and for a time Rex put from him the vision of the "Victoria Cross." Dot said it would be equally grand, if not more, to be a missionary. She and he would do wonders on their own lovely island, and would return in years to come and found a mission station, and build a sweet little English church on it, like Briarwood.

At last they had to say "good-bye," and Captain Paton, Roy, and "the couple," started for England; Roy giving a handsome reward to Jumbo and Fag. A telegram had been sent, announcing their safety and arrival at the mission station, and of their intention of leaving by a certain

steamer for England. But strange enough, they never received it at Radcliffe Hall, so Sir Roland was not at Southampton; and Rex, who had been awfully excited, was quieted with a vague fear, which Roy dispelled by saying the steamer was two days earlier than the telegram stated.

It was Christmas Eve when they reached home. It seemed to Rex years since he had left.

"Roy," said he, "Dot and I are going to sing the last hymn we sang the Sunday before I went away so do not ring the bell. Come round to the drawing-room windows." Rex's voice shook at first from mingled feelings. They commenced with a short Christmas hymn, and Dot's voice came out much stronger.

A party in deep mourning was seated within—Sir Roland and Lady Radcliffe, with all their children, *except one*. The Desmonds were there for Christmas. Oh, no, not for any festivities, but that they might bear together in loving sympathy this first season of double bereavement.

There were not any decorations about the place. Katie had all her dolls round her in the deepest mourning, bestowing the greatest care and attention on the blind ones, in lasting memory of Rex and his pop-gun.

"Hush!" said Lady Roland, suddenly. "How sweetly those children are singing out there."

"Let us give them the money," lisped the twins.

"I fancy it is two girls," said Mrs. Desmond.

"I'll look," said Katie, going to the only window that was unshuttered. "I think one is a boy."

"Wait," said her mother, "they are beginning again. Oh, I wish they would not sing *that*, I cannot bear it. Hark! there is the boy singing alone, Roland—listen!"

"'Guide them, keep them, go before them.' Oh, how like the voice of our darling. I must see who it is," and Lady Roland rushed to the window, and in an instant she had

thrown it open with a cry, that brought her husband and everyone else after her. Now she was on the terrace.

"Rex! Rex! It is—it is!"

"Mother! Father!"

"My boy! My boy!"

"And you are Dot, surely? Say you are!" cried Mrs. Desmond.

"Yes, I am Dot."

Roy waited until the first joyful surprise was over—joy too sacred and intense for words. Then he came forward, and was received with great warmth, and explained how he had sent two telegrams, and could only suppose that the messenger had lost them or stolen the money.

The party never separated until they were startled by the chimes of Christmas bells. Yes, had they ever heralded in such double news of peace, rest, and union?

Fervent was the thanksgiving poured forth by Sir Roland Radcliffe ere the party went to their rooms—Rex and Dot kneeling side by side between the two mothers. Hearts were too full for words.

Late as it was, Rex followed his father to his room. He could not sleep, he said, until he had explained all, and then he asked and received a full and perfect forgiveness.

To soften the parting between Rex and Dot, Sir Roland obtained a private tutor, so that the children might meet occasionally. Then Rex went off to a public school, so Dot had only to look forward to the holidays; but by that time she had been accustomed to her mother—was learning to love her dearly, feeling at last fully convinced she would never be sold again.

Sandhurst was to be Rex's next destination.

"You are quite sure, father, you have not the least objection to my going into the army?"

"Objection! Certainly not," was the answer. "Fulfil the wishes of your early days."

"If I did not go into the army I think I would be a medical missionary," said Rex, slowly.

"Be both, my boy. I mean, be a missionary in the army. You could not have a wider field—a grander career. Be a true soldier of the Cross."

So away went Rex to Sandhurst.

"The next act was the obtaining of his commission.

"Before he joined his regiment as a young ensign, he spent a week at home, to be present at the marriage of his eldest sister. He would not have missed that day for the world, for she was to marry the beloved friend of his boyhood, and they had continued brothers in affection ever since, cemented by a bond that could never be broken.

Roy took the position of an elder brother, and Sir Roland Radcliffe had received him warmly, first as the grandson of his old friend, and secondly when Roy, in a long private conversation, told him the secret of his first love for Rex.

Sir Roland was deeply moved, and felt drawn to him by a stronger chord, and rejoiced when his consent was asked to be his son indeed.

It was not till then that Roy confided to Rex that great secret of their first meeting in the plantation.

"I am glad you have told me," said Rex, with a wring of his hand. "It was always a mystery to me what you meant about my having saved your life. It shall be to me a new 'article of war'—so to be armed, that you may save a life without knowing it."

Of course, for Katie's wedding, Rex was best-man, and Dot first bridesmaid; and very lovely she looked, more beautiful than the bride, said most of the guests. Of course, Rex agreed with the majority, especially when he went to say good-bye directly after the bride and bridegroom had departed. She was just passing through the conservatory on her way to the drawing-room.

"Dot; you will have your wish soon."

"What wish?" enquired she.

"Oh, you know quite well. You hoped our marriage was not legal, so that you might have it all over again."

"How can you be so silly?" said she, giving a tug to a branch of azalea.

"And you know," went on he, without heeding her, "it was not legal. So, Miss Dorothy Desmond, you will have your wish of having it all over again."

"I am not going to be married over again. I have forgotten all about such nonsense—what I said."

"Oh, you mean it was legal?" interrupted Rex, mischievously. "Then we had better follow Roy's example, and go on our wedding-tour."

"Go away. I have said good-bye once," said Dorothy, her face a slight shade of the carnations at her side.

"I do not mean to see you again until you have won the 'Victoria Cross,' as you said."

"Then that is to be a bargain," said Rex. "Directly I win the 'Victoria Cross,' you will repeat the ceremony of Briarwood Church? Now promise," placing himself between her and the door.

"I may safely promise, Rex, for you have joined a regiment not going on foreign service, so you will never have the opportunity of winning it. Now, sir, let me pass."

"Oh, yes. Good-bye, again."

Dorothy Desmond, instead of going to the drawing-room, flew up to her own room, with her eyes full of tears.

Time passed on. There was a rising in the East, and Rex's regiment was ordered to be ready to take the place of another.

It came a surprise and a blow to more than one, and many were the months of hope, fear, and suspense. Once they heard he was distinguishing himself, then that he was wounded, then a cruel waiting, then a telegram, "Coming home."

Dorothy was staying at the Hall, when she came in and saw Sir Roland and his wife reading a letter.

Not any for her? Was anything the matter? No, said they, looking so beaming, that all fear was dispelled. He had some important business to transact, and would be with them next day.

Another joyful meeting.

"Dorothy," said he, suddenly, "when is a certain ceremony coming off? When are you going to say the words you were once never tired of repeating, 'Let no man put asunder?'"

"I shall never say those words again. I wish you had never remembered them."

"But I have, and you will have to listen to them again."

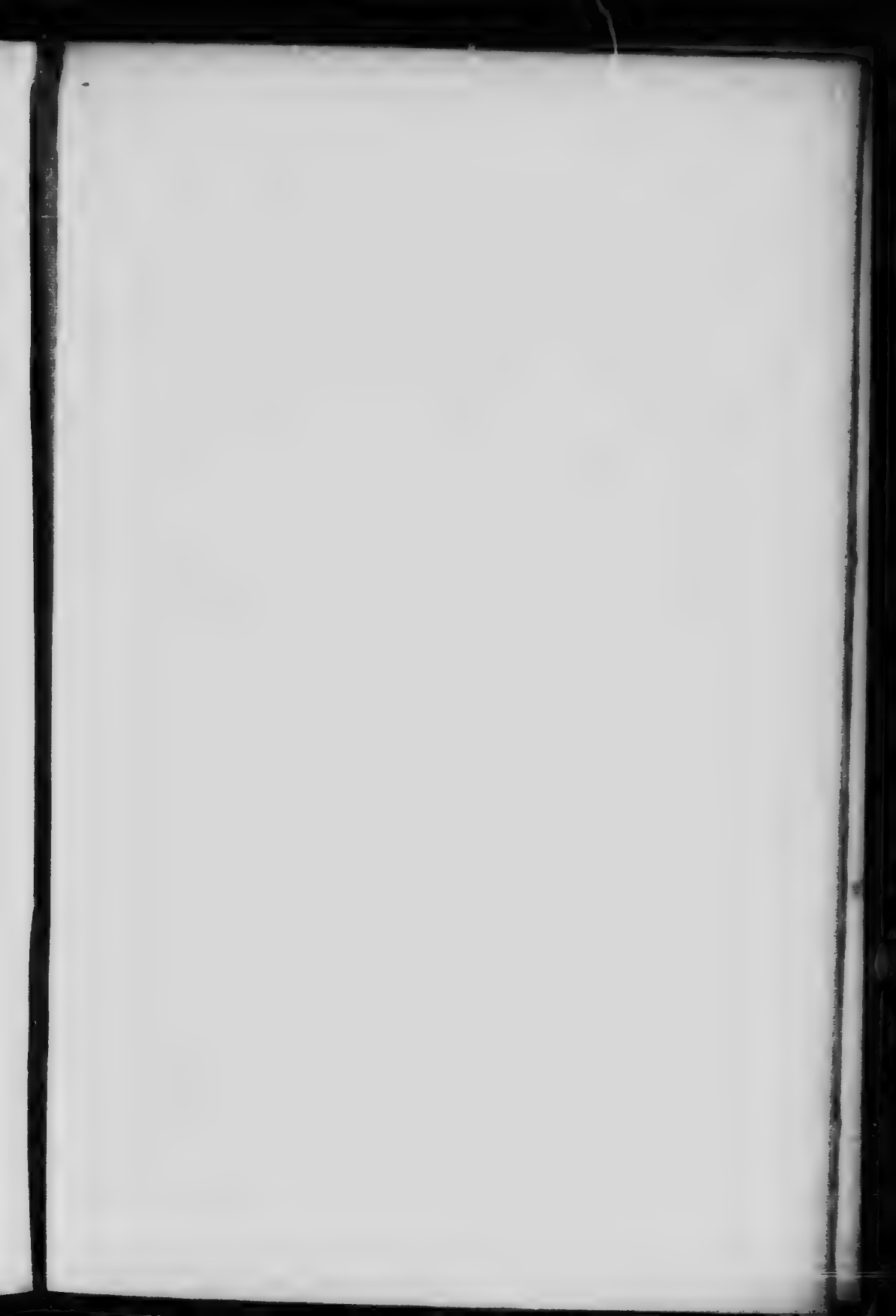
"Wait till you have won that grand dream of your childhood. Some day, when you have 'saved many lives' then, perhaps when you are an old general. Sir Roland, make him be quiet."

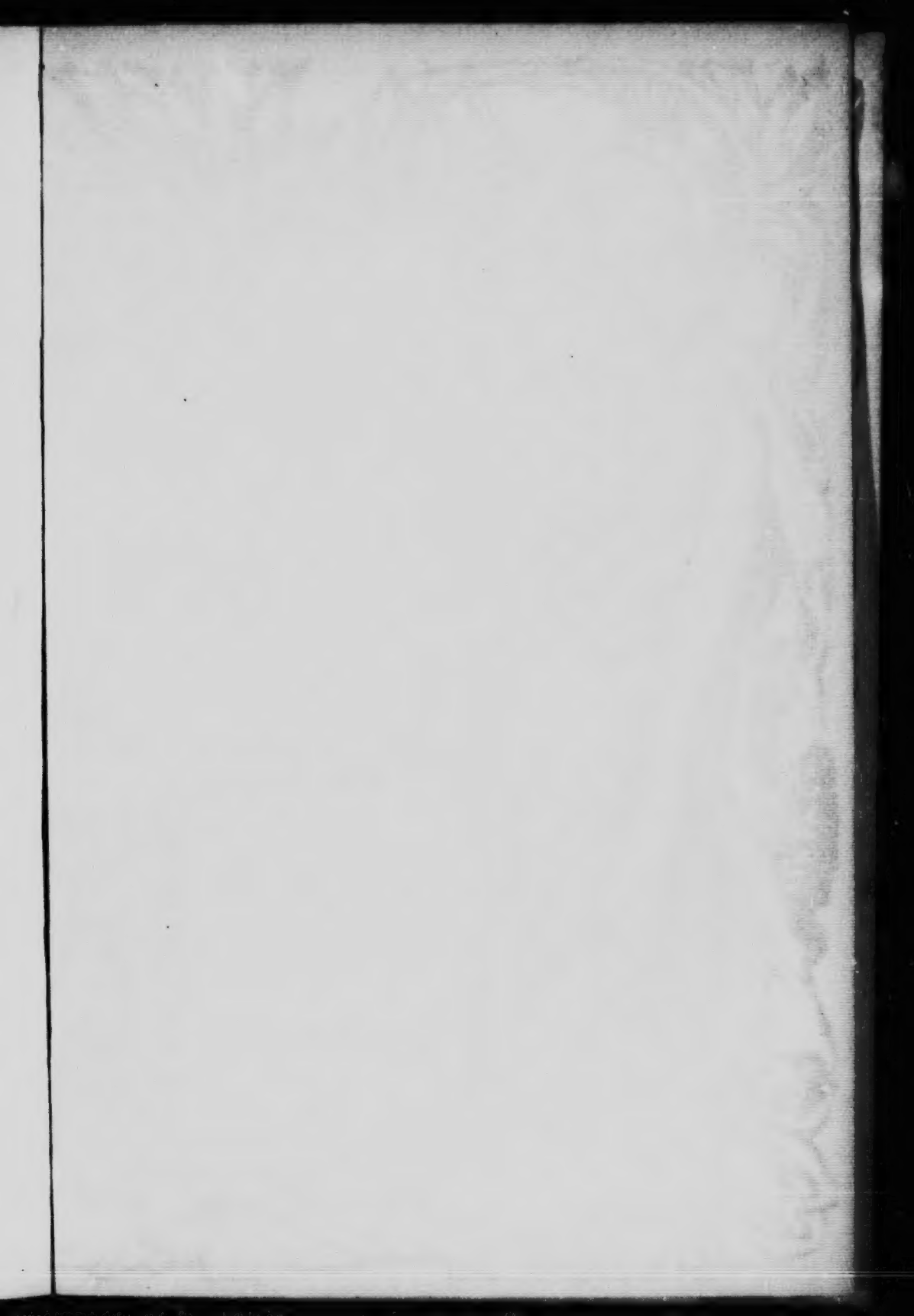
"I cannot," laughed he. "You have promised."

"Look, Dot," cried Rex, drawing her towards him. "Look, the dream of my childhood is fulfilled. I have just come from Windsor—from the Queen!"

Rex threw aside his outer coat, and Dot saw the "Victoria Cross."

THE END







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